

The Archbishop and the Lady

Mrs. Schuyler Crowninshield

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THE ARCHBISHOP AND THE LADY

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BY

MRS. SCHUYLER CROWNINSHIELD

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TO

MADAME JULIETTE ADAM

A SOJOURN AT WHOSE CHARMING ESTATE SUGGESTED TO THE AUTHOR THE SETTING FOR A PART OF HER STORY

"The Anchorage"
Mt. Desert Island, Maine
October, 1900

THE ARCHBISHOP AND THE LADY

I.

The heavy little train, with its carriages modelled apparently after the pattern of a child's toy, rumbled slowly away from the station, starting up a new cloud of dust which whirled with appropriate laziness. It appeared to be a sleepy valley, this Val de Moncousis, and the dust of the track emulated the motion of the train which caused it to arise.

Quentin had seen his belongings thrown upon the asphalted platform, and picking up his valise, he turned toward the plastered station and entered. He made for the exit, gave up his ticket and passed through the further door. He came upon a circle of green round which the white road wound the end of its loop-like thread. The circle and accompanying road reminded him of a frying-pan with a long handle stretching away down the slight incline. There was no carriage standing there as he had expected, and to his disgust no vehicle of any kind.

Quentin turned to the Chef de Gare.

"Is there no carriage here from the Abbey?"

"As M'sieu sees there is none."

"I telegraphed."

The Chef de Gare shrugged his shoulders.

"Can I get a conveyance?"

The Chef de Gare repeated the encouraging gesture.

"They are all away, M'sieu. It is a fête day, as probably M'sieu knows. There is nothing to be had; a little later, perhaps——"

"Can you send my things over to the Abbey? I suppose it is not too far for me to walk?"

Another shrug. "As I have already said, M'sieu, a little later, if M'sieu will be satisfied with that, but at the moment the new rich lord has taken the station wagon. He came by the last train. He lives across the valley some kilometres away. He telegraphed!"

"So did I," said Quentin, his tone showing much annoyance.

"Is M'sieu certain about the date? Did not M'sieu, perhaps, say to-morrow?"

Quentin turned and faced this new speaker.

"Yes," said he, "but I wrote it yesterday."

"And was not M'sieu's message sent, perhaps, this morning?"

Quentin uttered an exclamation of chagrin. It was true. He had written the message on the previous evening, as he had crossed in the boat from Southampton, and had handed it in that very morning at Paris, without remembering that the word "to-morrow" should have been changed for the word "to-day."

"And you are——?"

"The telegraph clerk, M'sieu."

Quentin turned away with the wish that he had some one to blame but himself.

"I sent the boy over with the message a half hour ago," continued the man.

Only a half hour ago! Then naturally they had not sent for him; probably the boy had not yet arrived at the Abbey.

Quentin stood and thought for a moment. He looked across the valley to the wooded height, wondering how soon the station wagon would come rattling down the road. He turned and gazed along the track after the baby train which was rumbling slowly round a distant curve. The evening dew was bringing out the odors of the flowers, the sun had set some time since.

"Is it far?" he asked, turning again to the clerk.

"Not so far, M'sieu. A matter of five or six kilometres, perhaps."

"And you will send my traps over, then?"

"So soon as that lazy Antoine returns, M'sieu. He should be back by now. He may overtake the M'sieu on the road."

The Chef de Gare shaded his eyes with his hand from habit, for the sun had sunk behind the opposite hills, and looked down along the handle of the frying-pan. The valley was now cold and gray. A few faint stars were beginning to stand out against their background of dark blue.

"Very well, I will start. Which way then?"

"It is an easy walk, M'sieu. M'sieu need not start by the road." Quentin had taken a few steps in the direction of rounding the circle. "If M'sieu will return through the gare, I can show him a shorter way than that. The carriage road runs back for some distance, that it may underrun the railway." They entered the station, and came out again upon the

platform where Quentin had alighted. "I will be responsible"—the Chef de Gare looked anxiously up along the track in the direction of Paris—"for taking M'sieu across the track. Eh bien! now, down that little slope; in that way M'sieu will cut off a half kilometre, perhaps. Just below there is the road which M'sieu must follow until he comes to the Abbey wall. A high wall on the right, the wall of L'Abbaye de Bref."

"How shall I know when I am there? You have so many walls in your country——"

"The M'sieu cannot fail to know. It is the only wall of such great height. It was built to keep the Religious in." The Chef de Gare smiled. "It had not always that effect, as M'sieu has probably heard, though it is so high. The M'sieu cannot miss the Abbey. It is only about five kilometres, at most, from the station."

"I may lose my way on another road."

"There is no other road, M'sieu. There is just room enough between the wall on the right and the hill on the left for the road. M'sieu must ring at the green door in the wall."

"All doors, like all cats, are black at night," said Quentin smiling.

"I could wish that it was not so dark a night," said the Chef de Gare, with a thread of anxiety in his tone.

"It is not dark, my friend."

"But it soon will be, M'sieu, long before M'sieu can reach L'Abbaye de Bref. For me I prefer to make my visits there in the day time." His tone caused Quentin to look questioningly at him. "But then there are others who are not of my opinion.

Merci bien! M'sieu," as he pocketed the liberal douceur, "the luggage of M'sieu will soon follow him, if I can get that stupid Antoine to go over the Abbey road at night. Bon soir, M'sieu. The M'sieu must keep straight on to the——" but Quentin with long quick strides had put a non-hearing distance between himself and his voluble adviser.

Quentin struck out at a smart pace, following the dim ribbon of white, which showed itself under the twilight. His coat and shoes were covered with the very palpable dust of the country highway, but he pushed sturdily onward. The walk, notwithstanding the all-pervading dust, was a relief to him. He had been sitting in the train for some time, and before that had been driving about Paris on various matters of business, and he thankfully stretched his legs.

He met no one, and, after walking a half hour or more, his road turned to the left, and he found that he was ascending a gentle rise. At the top of the hill the road once more turned to the right, and in the dim distance he thought that he saw the figure of a man or boy. "Probably the telegraph messenger," he said to himself.

As there were no cross roads to distract him, Quentin kept on as he had been advised by the Chef de Gare. The moon, which seemed to be struggling to arise from behind a barrier on the left, was beginning to silver the treetops upon the crest of the hills.

This must be the wood of which the Chef de Gare had spoken.

As Quentin continued upon his way there began to loom up upon his right a dark object. It stretched away across the fields at right angles to the wood, and

he felt sure that this must be the Abbey wall, which wall, he had heard, enclosed the whole domain. A further walk of five minutes brought him to the angle where the wall began to march and run parallel with the road, and then he found himself within a groove, its sides being formed by the wall on the one side, and the wooded height upon the other. Some cool gusts of wind swept down the hill-side and brought with them the odors of a twilit wood. A few birds chirped to each other a late good-night. Quentin stopped for a moment, to become better acquainted with this wall, which seemed to enclose and make of the place where he was to remain for the next few days a veritable fortress. The wall was apparently impregnable. Its face was flat, and though composed of rough stones, it gave no chance for hand or foot-hold. Its top, he found later, was roofed with glazed tiles. Foolish indeed would be the mortal who should attempt to surmount it, unless he possessed a ladder of unusual length.

As Quentin paused to survey the wall he became conscious that he was being surveyed in turn by some scrutinizing eye. He started, and peered through the semi-darkness. A faint glimmer, creeping over the hill behind him cast an eerie light upon an object above his head. It fell upon a thin elfish face, from which supernaturally large eyes gazed.

"Is that you, little Father?" said a child's high voice, and without waiting for an answer, "Valery, is that you?"

The moon was clearing the treetops now, and Quentin found that he was gazing upward upon the face of a child. It looked unearthly in the green light of the moon.

"How did you get up there?" asked Quentin. "It must be at least four or five feet above my head."

"I am glad you spoke," said a high little voice, an awed voice, from which all traces of fear had not vanished; "I thought you were a Return. It is those Returns that make me afraid. Nothing else makes me to fear."

"Return!" repeated Quentin in amaze, which showed in his voice, for his face was in shadow.

"Yes, yes, those Returns, those Revenants." The tone was impatient. "The nun of the oubliette; the Abbess who imprisoned her, those poor little ones; the grand Seigneur—Ah! bah! why will I speak that French? I thought you might be my father. Then I thought you might be Father Halle. Alixe has gone up the road. She told me to wait for her here. I was not to tell any one. You will not tell of Alixe. Not to Mamasha, neither to any one; I love Alixe."

"I will not tell," said Quentin, wondering whom this unknown Alixe might be who went to the wood in this gloomy hour, leaving a child to keep watch upon the wall.

"I was to tell her if Mamasha called. You will not speak of the Grand Seigneur, if you should come to the Abbey," urged the child.

"I know nothing of the Grand Seigneur, child. Tell me where to find the green door in the wall."

"I knew you must be for the Abbaye. No one comes this far who is not for the Abbaye. I beg of you not to speak of the Grand Seigneur, because they tell me that I should not know of him, and Alixe sends them away if they tell me about him. It was because of the Grand Seigneur that the Lady Abbess put the poor nun in the oubliette. Not Alixe, but the

old, old Lady Abbess who lived here hundreds and hundreds of years ago. The one who lived behind the iron doors, and counted her money, and hugged it close because of the Robber-knights. When she comes, Marie Monrouge says, she always has her bag of offerings hugged close to her breast, that Abbess. I should not like to see that Lady Abbess!"

"You poor little atom," said Quentin kindly. "They have stuffed you full of nonsense, haven't they? Get down from that wall and talk sense. Here! let me help you down. Can you jump?"

"I must not go until Alixe comes," said the child. "Can you not stay until Alixe comes? Do stay!"

Just here a sweet low cry came softly upon the evening air.

"Gartha, Gartha, where are you?"

Quentin looked along the road. Then he dimly discerned two figures standing together under the wall.

"Come, little one," said he, "is that for you?"

As Quentin spoke he glanced again toward the figures and saw that one of them was clad in black, the other in white.

The child disappeared instantly from the top of the wall, her voice sounded indistinctly from the other side.

"Good, strange Monsieur, do not stay late." He heard the voice growing fainter as the child got nearer the earth. "Alixe demands me at the garden gate. I must remove the hook."

Quentin heard the pattering of little feet on the other side of the stone barrier.

He stood still. He did not wish to intrude upon strangers at this unseemly hour. His hostess, he

knew, was not named Alixe. Perhaps he had made a mistake and had come to the wrong house. Perhaps his whilom friend had gone away. She was ever erratic, if kindly; never more so, Quentin thought, than when she began a correspondence with him after a fortnight's acquaintance at Trouville, which finally merged into a pressing request that he should pay her a visit at the Abbey.

Quentin saw that the two figures stood for a moment in the road, evidently talking together, and that when they parted the white figure halted a moment, then returned to the other. He had started forward, and could not help hearing the final sentences of this mysterious pair.

"Then you think it safe for me to come?" asked a man's voice.

The answer came in the sweet low tone which had called "Gartha, Gartha, where are you?"

"Safe! and why not? I am not afraid, why should you be? No one will know."

Then the white figure seemed to melt into the darkness of the wall. By the time that it had vanished Quentin was close upon the other. The man was still standing where he had been left alone, his head bent upon his breast. Quentin's footfall made no sound in the thick dust of the road.

"Alixe! Alixe!" he heard in muttered tones that were full of despair. He saw that he was trespassing upon forbidden ground, and spoke at once in a clear voice. "Good evening, my friend," he said. "Can you tell me the way to the Abbaye de Bref?"

It was the figure of a priest which stood before Quentin. He was dressed in the long black frock of his order. His face was pale, his features working

convulsively, but he drew a quick breath and pulled himself together at the inquiry.

"We are near the entrance," he replied coldly. He surveyed the distinguished looking stranger critically. "And what may you wish with the Abbaye de Bref?"

"I am a belated traveller," answered Quentin. "My luggage is at the station. My telegram must have been——"

"A visitor? And to whom, pray?"

At the priest's abrupt manner the blood rushed to Quentin's face, but in a flash he realized that this man was connected in some way with those whom he was about to meet, to visit, and, controlling himself, he replied,

"To the owner, Madame Petrofsky; she is here, I suppose."

The priest gave a short laugh. "To the owner!" he said. "Pardon me, Monsieur, I will show you the way."

Quentin walked along by his side for about a hundred yards, neither of them speaking. He glanced furtively at his guide as they proceeded. Suddenly the priest halted. "The door is there," he said.

"I see no door," said Quentin groping blindly.

As he spoke he was conscious of the distant sound of gay laughter somewhere within the interior. The priest started with an exclamation of anger. He bent his head as if to listen, and then said, in a voice hardly raised above a whisper, "The light has gone out."

Quentin glanced upward and saw that a lantern, whose wick was smoking from a glowing spark, hung above the door.

"I will ring for you," said the priest. From habit

obviously, he reached his hand upward in the darkness and found and jerked the handle that hung there. Then a loud metallic note pealed out on the still air. There was silence for a moment and then a distant voice was heard and a glimmer of light began to show through a now apparent crevice. There was a shuffling of feet and a rattling of bolts, and the door opened a little way.

"Who is there?"

Quentin turned to thank the priest, but he had disappeared.

"It is I," he answered, "Mr. Quentin. I am come upon a visit to Madame Petrofsky. Is she——"

For answer the servant opened the door wider, threw back an ornamented grille, and Quentin stepped inside the doorway.

He emerged upon a broad gravelled space, and so stood while the man closed both gate and door. Instead of being under cover he was no more so than he had been at any time that evening. He found himself standing still beneath a moonlit sky, beneath his feet the fine gravel of the esplanade. Upon his left rose a grim pile of stone, whose barred windows were the more visible to the eye because of the many lights within.

Directly in front of him, an hundred feet away, perhaps, and upon a line with the door by which he had entered the enclosure, his glance fell upon a vast interior. The prisms of an immense hanging lamp were reflected in the highly polished floor. Quentin caught in a flash the glitter of antique furniture and bric-à-brac, exquisite draperies, and pictures hanging against a wonderful background of color; the soft shades of heavy rugs and handsome skins, the long

broad vista, a bewildering mass of well chosen and expensive furnishings. There seemed to be no one in the great salon, but Quentin saw that it stood at right angles with the pile upon his left, and, in fact, was an immense, jutting-out corner of that structure. Then, as he waited, strange and alone, he was suddenly conscious of lights in the near distance upon his right. Voices were intermingled in a gentle murmur, not yet distinct to his ear; there was a pleasant glow upon the gravel of the terrace, and over all broke the sweet shrill voice of Madame, his friend, Madame, bidding him welcome. "You dear!" exclaimed Madame delightedly, "you dear!"

"It is always the expected which happens here, my friend," said Madame, as she came forward, her small dainty figure showing more prominently as she approached from out the middle distance of darkness. Her hands were outstretched; in one of them she held a napkin; her skirts made a soft frou-frou against the gravel of the terrace.

"I had just been telling the Archbishop that we were expecting you. Was I not, your Grace?" This in louder tones to some one further away. "I had almost given you up. Expect you for dinner?" She took Quentin's hand in hers as she walked along by his side. "No, not particularly, but I am always expecting some one, and I was quite sure that you had made a mistake in the telegram, men always do. The messenger was just ahead of you. I had just sent to tell Barker to get the landau——"

"I sent the telegram this morning," said Quentin, as he paced along the terrace by her side, his bronzed face bent down upon her upturned one.

"And you convict yourself out of your own mouth! but I knew from your last letter that you had made a mistake in the date."

"So that was the boy ahead of me?"

"Oh, yes, undoubtedly; but I never send messengers."

"What do you do then?" asked Quentin, smiling down from his fine height upon the pretty, still youthful-looking widow, who looked up so smilingly at him.

"Why, we just come. Don't we, Alixe?"

Quentin started and raised his eyes. A figure in white was approaching from the opposite end of the terrace. The tall woman was followed by a small child. Quentin understood at once that the two had come along inside the wall, while he was walking in the same direction over the road, guided by the priest; the objective point of all being the table set beneath a trellissed roof. There were hanging lamps above the table, whose light flickered with every breath of the soft night air, and standing upon it were other lamps which gave forth a more steady light. The table was handsomely set with glass and silver, and there were bouquets of flowers in the centre space, and at either end.

"Ah! here comes our Lady Abbess!" It was the Archbishop who spoke, rising partly as he did so, "somewhat late, but ever welcome."

There were many persons seated at the table, perhaps twenty in all, and Madame now took the seat which she had just vacated to greet her friend.

"Sit here by me, Mr. Quentin. Mademoiselle, will you move down one seat? Alixe, this is my friend, Mr. Quentin; His Grace the Archbishop, Mr.

Quentin; Mademoiselle, Mr. Quentin; Baroness, Miss Thorndyke, Mr. Quentin." Several other names were mentioned at which their owners bowed slightly.

"And me!" It was Gartha who spoke.

Quentin gave her a flickering smile, and shook his head in good comradeship, as if saying, "I will not tell." Gartha nodded hers.

"Alixe, I do wish that you and Gartha could ever be on time. Here his Grace's soup has been getting cold——"

"Do not mind me," said the Archbishop, with that gentle tone which was ever the first factor toward making him beloved of his friends. "I do not care for hot soup in this weather."

"You must pardon me, your Grace," said Alixe. "Gartha and I ramble sometimes rather far afield."

Quentin murmured something in Madame's ear about wishing that he could have dressed.

"You shall dress to-morrow," said Madame with a happy laugh, laying her hand on his for a moment. "You shall certainly do as you like now that I have got you here. Why were you never willing to come before?" The playful reproach in her tone made Quentin uncomfortable, especially as he saw afar down the table a pair of gray eyes fixed scrutinizingly upon him.

The soup, a "croûte au pot," was excellent, and Quentin ate as became a traveller. To his surprise a melon was handed after the soup.

As Quentin ate his melon he glanced occasionally at Alixe, and this is what he saw: A woman tall, slim, high-shouldered, her face pale, her lips a delicate pink, the upper one so short as constantly to disclose her small white teeth set at an angle, the masses

of her light brown hair pushed over her ears with silver combs and falling in loops upon her neck. Frills and falls of fluffy lisse and lace drooping forward, and tumbling in jabots from her shoulders to her waist, her long arms sometimes showing up to the elbow, as they protruded from the flowing open sleeve, sometimes entirely concealed amid the mass of chiffon, which seemed to enhance her angular young beauty. Upon her head she wore a sort of white stuff hat such as the Russian peasants wear, probably made of some sort of angora silk. Its brim curled upward, through which the light from the lamp above her head shone with a glow which seemed to form a halo. She did not offer to remove the hat, nor did she apologize for her appearance, which was quite at variance with the conventional dinner toilettes which Quentin saw all along on both sides of the table. Her costume had the effect of making him feel more at ease in his travelling suit.

Quentin drank her in as he raised his eyes. He thought her the most picturesque figure by which his gaze had thus far been arrested. Alixe gave him one direct straightforward glance from her seat at the extreme end of the table, and helped Gartha to some melon.

"Yes, he was unfrocked," said the Archbishop, evidently continuing an interrupted conversation. "My office forbids me to discuss the matter, but as you ask me, I must answer that he has been unfrocked."

"Of whom are you speaking, Your Grace?" asked Mademoiselle, a black little minim with a gray moustache.

Alixe glanced at her with a shade of annoyance

flashing across her face. She began to speak, thought better of it, and drooped her head to the hearing with a resigned sigh.

"Father Halle, Mademoiselle, him whom you know as Father Halle, but it is a painful subject, let us drop it."

"But Robert Halle was——"

"Little girls should be neither seen nor heard," said Alixe, looking severely at the child who had spoken. "Come! you had better go to your bed." She arose. "It is too late for you to be up."

"But when the child has had no dinner," called Madame in her high shrill voice, "and when you yourself kept her out, Alixe, and she misses her tea, and then——"

Gartha had risen and was standing, awaiting the final decision of Alixe. She looked at her questioningly submissive, as if desiring only to know her wishes to obey.

"It is true," said Alixe reseating herself. "Sit down again, Gartha, but occupy yourself with your dinner. I will give you ten minutes, and you see there is no time for words."

"There is a pilauf, Alixe," said Gartha humbly.

"Charles, bring some of the pilauf for Mademoiselle Gartha."

"I love you, Alixe," said Gartha.

"Eat not so goulûment, Garta," screamed Mademoiselle warningly.

"Alixe is always just," shrilled Madame. "Even when the dear Duke——"

"Mamasha, let us leave the discussion of my virtues for another time." Something like a smile flitted across the face of the speaker.

"I will explain to you later," murmured Madame in Quentin's ear. "Alixe hates to be talked over, but to-morrow we will go up into the wood and——"

"Let us go into the wood and talk about yourself, Madame," suggested Quentin, in so low a tone and with so much fervour that the Archbishop directed a scrutinizing glance across the table at him, and Madame flushed becomingly.

Quentin's ear, though trained to catch the spoken French language with little trouble, was constantly on the alert. One never knew which tongue would be uppermost, and sometimes Lady Barnes, a linguist of repute, indulged in flights among the Italian and Spanish languages. Alixe spoke Russian to a servant who waited at the table, and madame occasionally brought a Russian word or sentence into the conversation. When Madame spoke it, it sounded to Quentin, who did not speak Russian, as if that language were being dragged in by the heels. This astonished him, as he had understood that Madame was a Russian.

Before the meal was ended, she, whom Quentin knew only by the name of Alixe, arose.

"Say good night, Gartha," said she, "and kiss Mamasha's hand. Make your courtesy to His Grace. Come now! Off we go!"

The child did as she was bid; then the two bowed ceremoniously to the assembled company, and vanished along the terrace, the child clinging close to the tall figure, who walked with her head bent somewhat forward, thus concealing her real height.

"I do wish Alixe were a little more conventional," sighed Madame. In the darkness could be heard the sound of the voices of the two, and the skipping of light feet across the loose gravel of the terrace, and

the cries of, "Alixe, where are you?" or "Gartha, where have you gone?" and the answering cry of "Here I am; come and find me."

There was merry laughter, low and soft from the one, and a child's glad cry from the other, and finally a far door down along the terrace opened for a moment, emitting a broad gleam of light, and then was closed, shutting away the sound of the voices, and the sight of these incongruous playmates.

"Ow ze Duchess spoils Garta," remarked a lady whom they addressed as Baroness.

The Duchess! Who was the Duchess?

"Coffee in the salon, Charles," said Madame as she arose. She turned toward the prelate. "And must you leave us to-morrow, Your Grace?"

"Without doubt, dear Madame. I must take a morning train back to Paris. It was difficult for me to get away even for a day." And then, in a lower tone, "I had heard of Halle's being seen about here, and I felt it my duty to warn you, not only as an old friend, but as a priest of the church, to have nothing to do with him."

"But Robert has always——"

"You must not condone his behavior, Madame, because he is a friend; you—a devoted daughter of the church."

Quentin thought of the black figure which he had seen at the gate. Had he unearthed a mystery so soon? Was this Father Halle, the unfrocked priest? Could he be loitering here to do some injury to this benign looking old man? Was it his, Quentin's, duty to inform his Grace that a priest lurked without the wall? Should he so early in his visit volunteer unpleasant information of which he only was possessed?

Had the Archbishop been departing at once Quentin might have felt bound to declare what he had seen, but his Grace had said "to-morrow," there could be little danger in the light of day; and then, there was Alixe. Quentin knew of no other name by which to call her, in his thoughts. A feeling of loyalty toward her sprang up within his breast, a feeling which he quenched at once as absurd. She would hardly be grateful to him for his loyalty. She had vouchsafed him not a word. She had given him simply a cold bow of welcome and as cold a good night.

Coffee was served in the grand salon of the château. It was a walk of about two hundred feet from the trellissed arbour where they had dined to the great door of the main house. They all trooped, in well-bred disorder, into the great salon, of which Quentin had caught a glimpse upon his arrival. There were many persons in the room; black coated men and charmingly costumed women. Quentin felt himself too travel-stained to remain with that brilliant company. The ringing of the bell at the gate gave him an excuse to rise. As he hoped, it proved to be the tardy Antoine with his belongings, and he followed Madame out on to the terrace as the door was opened.

"Is that all you brought?" asked Madame in a disappointed tone, with her pretty Russian accent and childish lisp. "Take Monsieur's things to the chalet, Eugene. I will go with you and show you your quarters. No, no! It is a pleasure. It's a queer old place. Have you any nerves, Mr. Quentin? I hope not. Bruno's rooms are there also. Bruno is an enthusiastic inventor. He goes away to get ideas and buy chemicals. Sometimes I wish he were not quite so enthusiastic."

"Bruno?" said Quentin interrogatively.

"Yes, my nephew, Count St. Aubin. He may possibly arrive before you leave us. We never know—hold the light, Pierre Monrouge. Come this way, my friend."

They were out of doors with only the sky, moon and stars above them. It was a perfect night. The air came softly to caress the cheek, filled with the breath of the cinnamon pinks and the midsummer roses. Quentin paced along the terrace by the side of Madame. They passed the deserted table, where the swinging and standing lamps lighted up the disordered remains of the feast. The table was set within a sort of alcove, a wall, the outer wall of the enclosure, making the inner boundary of the recess. The other three sides were open, except for the pillars of stone which upheld the roof, and showed their ancient roughness between the masses of greenery with which the vines had draped them.

"The chalet looks like an entresol on stilts, doesn't it?" laughed Madame.

A few steps further on they stopped at the entrance to a stairway, down which some beams of light flickered. There seemed to be a struggle going on to get Quentin's belongings up the stairs, and he turned his back until it should be over.

"You feel just as I do," said Madame, as she also turned away. "When they are bringing a rented piano into my apartment in town, I go out for the day. When I return, there stands the piano. Magic has been at work. I have simply waved my wand. I do not care to see the men perspire and hear them groan, and perhaps give vent to an occasional curse, which I know is intended for me. My servants may

hear that. That is what I pay them for." She walked out to the edge of the broad terrace; Quentin followed. She stood there, her youthful back turned toward her guest, looking up the long valley in the direction of Paris. Nearer, the greenish light was flooding the plateau below the terrace, and silvering the ragged edges of the Abbey, which Quentin seemed now to have noticed for the first time. It stood perhaps three hundred feet or so beyond the terrace, and made an exquisite picture in the uncertain rays of light. The great rose-blooms were nodding in the evening breeze and sending forth languorous odors as they moved.

"I feel as if I were living in a dream," said Quentin. "Do assure me that I shall not awake presently, at some fashionable watering place, or in a great stuffy room of a Paris hotel."

"It is a dream from which you need not awake, my friend," said Madame in her softest voice. "But you have seen ruins before. You have seen Kenilworth and Chatsworth and fifty others——"

"Yes, yes! As a tourist, a sightseer, but to live in a place like this, full of mystery, full of romance, to feel that it is mine for the moment, to look forward to days of exploration and nights of cold chills"—Quentin broke off with a contented shiver of delight. "You once asked me, Madame, what you might give me. You could give me nothing better than this; some days spent with you at l'Abbaye de Bref."

Madame turned toward him and laid her small hands upon his arm. She pressed it fondly. "You dear!" she said.

There was the sound of a succession of thumps within the chalet. Light was now streaming out of

three or four windows, and in a moment they heard feet descending the stairway. Then a ray of light crept wobblingly along the ground. Suddenly it spread into a star, as Antoine, a Rembrandt picture in illumination as well as ugliness, emerged from the doorway.

"Now, come, I will show you," said Madame, starting forward. "No, no!" as Quentin tried to put something into Antoine's hand. "Don't spoil the simple peasant. We pay them by the year over there at the station. Bon soir! Antoine. Follow me, my friend," and Madame disappeared within the open doorway.

There seemed to be no door; simply an archway of stone through which Quentin followed his guide. The stairs were of brick, the front of the treads of wood worn and hollow in places. The flight curved gently at the bottom, then ran straight and ended upon a landing also of brick. The two pairs of feet made a strange shuffling noise, as their owners proceeded. When they came out upon the landing, Quentin saw that an ancient looking lantern hung above his head and gave out a feeble light. Upon the right of the landing was an open door, and he saw that there was also a door upon the left. This door was closed.

"Those are Bruno's rooms," said Madame, pointing to the closed door, "and these are yours." She turned toward the open door and ushered Quentin into a charming chamber.

The room was well lighted with candles. It was in shape a rectangle. There were windows on either side, and at the further end a door was open. A light shone from within.

"This is your dressing room," said Madame, passing

through the first to the second chamber, "and here beyond again is another little place for your boxes, when Marie Monrouge has emptied them to-morrow."

Quentin found that he was in possession of two charming rooms, as well as a large closet, or, rather, a third room, in which were frames for coats, stands for trunks and boxes, a bath ready for the night, with cans of water standing by, and everything which was calculated to add to his comfort. This third room was not furnished. The floor was bare of carpet, except for the bath rug, which was in its place by the hat-bath.

The candle which Madame held flickered almost as if some one were blowing upon the flame. Quentin felt a cold blast of air on his neck, his cheek. He looked inquiringly toward the black opening from which the draught of air seemed to come.

Madame laughed tremulously.

"That was a doorway. You can see where the narrow little door has been removed from its hinges, ages ago perhaps. No one knows the date of anything in these old buildings, or when anything happened here. Things were always happening, I fancy. Don't go too near, my friend," as Quentin moved towards the top step. "Those stairs are steep, and I shall not want you laid up with a sprained ankle. There are too many lovely walks about this old place; and now that I have got you here at last, you must see everything there is to be seen—see it all with me."

Quentin stood peering down the stairway. He might as well have looked into a pocket. There seemed to be nothing below there but the blackness of darkness.

"Where does it lead to?" he asked.

"To an old disused door in the outer wall. Did you notice how broad and thick these walls are? No? You could hardly have had an opportunity yet except as you entered the place. You must see it to-morrow. Just here, I fancy, the wall is but a shell, and the passageway is left between the outer and the inner shell."

"That would be an easy way to storm your fortress," said Quentin, laughing. "The vulnerable point in your armor."

"The door is old, but the iron is thick. The bolts are strong, and the key we keep in the château. Alixe takes charge of it. The door is probably stronger than the wall itself. Besides, who should want to storm our fortress?" Madame laughed. "So far as I know we are at peace with the world."

"That is the third door of which I already know in your impregnable outer wall," said Quentin, jokingly.

"Ah!" Madame returned. "The Abbey has great possibilities. It is a place with a past. At one time, in the fifteenth century, I think Alixe said, it lapsed into simply a social and secular house. All religious vows were abrogated, if not formally, then by simply letting them fall into disuse. That was a generation of romance, such as nowadays we never dream of. There were love scenes, and flights, and punishments, and—but come! I must not keep you standing here. You must be tired to death!"

Madame set the candle down upon a little deal table, and returned to the dressing room and so through to the larger sleeping chamber.

"I see that Marie Monrouge has made both the beds," said she, glancing into the dressing room. "You can take your choice."

"I shall not want to go away at all," said Quentin, "after such an embarrassment of luxury. Four windows!" he added. "I shall not want for air."

"Two of them look upon the road," explained Madame. "The chalet is built, as you will see to-morrow, into the wall, welded into it, in fact, just as the château is built into it further along. Between the two and connecting them runs the simple wall of the domain for, perhaps, two hundred feet. The windows on the road we keep closed, though there is no reason why you should not have them open if you wish. But those on the terrace we always leave open. You will find no mosquitoes, my American friend, to disturb your night's rest, and now, good night!"

She turned to Quentin and held out both her hands.

He stretched out his own, and clasped them. How soft and small they were! How young she looked in the dim light of the lamp! Hardly more than thirty years of age.

"May you be so content with me—with us," she said, "that you will not care to leave the Abbey soon. Happy, happy dreams!" She had held Quentin's hands all the time that she was speaking.

"Good night, Mamasha," he laughingly returned. He shook her hands up and down in an embarrassed sort of way. "Good night, Mamasha, good night!"

She withdrew hers quickly.

"You heard my niece call me that," she said. "They all do it. You would think I were the mother of the whole human race."

"Not when I look at you," replied Quentin gallantly.

"You dear! Bruno calls me so, and Gartha——"

"The little girl is a relative, then?"

"She is the child of a sister of Alixe. Alixe is wrapped up in her. But come! No more to-night. Sleep well, arise when it pleases you, ring your bell for coffee, or come down to the arbour; above all, while you remain among us feel as if l'Abbaye de Bref were your home." Her sweet high voice rang the final words back at him, as she tick-tacked down the stair.

Quentin properly reproached himself for the evanescent thought that Madame's good night had been somewhat more fervid than the occasion warranted, and, experiencing a feeling of annoyance with himself, he proceeded to examine his quarters.

The floor was laid with octagon tiles of deep red, dull and mellow in tone. The windows were hung with curtains, fresh and neat, but whose creamy tinge confessed, perforce, to the flight of time since they were young. Upon them was a design of deep red, where shepherdesses and shepherds, with sheep to play propriety, disported themselves in the fields, and where carter lads and horses struggled with mountains of hay and carts much larger than themselves. The curtains were edged with a quaint red fringe and looped back with plain red bands. The wood work of the room was white. The walls were hung with a pale green stuff, against which he discovered some ancient prints at such a height that their little improprieties could not become large factors in the corrupting of those who tried from their distant stand upon the floor to decipher their meaning. Under foot were soft rugs, which caught in the heels of Quentin's shoes, and which he was constantly laying in place again. The bed, a high French bed, with its duvet

and mountain of little pillows, tickled his fancy, and he chuckled aloud as he wondered how he was going to sleep among such smothering comforts. The great dressing table was covered with the same material as that which draped the windows, and had Quentin possessed a woman's curiosity or domestic knowledge, he would have examined to find it but a simple construction of deal, made beautiful and useful by economical taste.

Quentin cast a glance toward the little dressing room, then he advanced slowly across its threshold. The flickering of the candle in the further room reminded him that it was still alight on the table where Madame had left it, and he entered the closet to extinguish it. The room had a lonely air; and as before the draught which came from the narrow staircase waved the flame to and fro. Quentin took the candle in his hand and leaned far over the opening, but again he could perceive nothing. With quick determination he retreated, and passing through the middle room into his bed-chamber, he closed and bolted the door.

"It is foolish to sleep in a draught," he said to himself, thus excusing a slight feeling to which he scarcely confessed, and, if he did acknowledge it ever so faintly, of which he was at the same moment ashamed. Remembering the neglected bath prepared for him, but too tired to more than reproach himself, he undressed hastily, and, climbing into the high bed, stretched his form along the cool and grateful linen.

Quentin had thought that sleep would have met him half-way, but although the perfect stillness of the night was broken by no disturbing sound, his new and strange surroundings, preceded by his somewhat adventurous arrival amid a houseful of people, but

one of whom he had ever met before, kept him awake. He thought as he lay there, in a state of pleasurable languor, that he heard the distant sounds of music, and once the notes of a voice rose upon the air, but it was faint, and listen as he would he could catch no consecutive sounds. He had never been in a place before the silence of which so impressed him. It pervaded all things. If he but moved in his bed, it seemed as if they must hear the sound in the château. Suddenly, voices somewhere near him brought him back from the borderland of dreams. He listened, than sat up in bed, then slid down from the slippery mountain to the floor, and approached the window. The voices came from two persons who were seated beneath the great tree, whose branches a little further on spread in shade across the gravel of the terrace. The voices were those of a man and a woman, but their words were indistinct. Some one was smoking, for Quentin saw the red spark of a cigar beneath the tree, and after a few moments the aroma of a very good Havana came drifting to his nostrils. He had no wish to know who these people were. He felt no curiosity at all in the matter. He leaned lazily out of the window, taking them in as part of the general interest of his surroundings. He gazed across his narrow little balcony at the ruined Abbey, at the far fields, and further hillsides; at the near flower garden, at the nearer terrace, and again glanced down at the two figures showing faintly through the low sweeping branches. He sniffed the fragrance again of the good cigar, and wished that he had not hurried off so soon to bed only to find that he could not sleep.

As he continued lazily to regard them, the two persons arose and came out from under the obscuring

shade of the tree, and now Quentin saw that they were his friend, Madame, and her guest, the Archbishop. Madame was talking volubly, while the Archbishop puffed slowly, listening courteously, until she had finished. The two began to pace the terrace side by side. Madame turned occasionally to lay her hand upon the Archbishop's arm. Finally as, extending their walk a few feet, they came near Quentin's balcony, the words of the Archbishop were brought distinctly to his ear.

"I warn you as a daughter of the church to have nothing to do with him, either now or at any other time. I assure you that you will regret it if you do."

"But if Alixe persists——"

Quentin shrank behind the vines, for they had reached the point opposite his darkened window. They passed on toward the end of the terrace, Madame still arguing, the Archbishop listening as he puffed his cigar. Quentin did not wait to see them return; he had no fancy for the rôle of eavesdropper, and again mounting to his mattress, he was soon asleep.

How long he slept he knew not. He was awakened by a sound. What it had been he could not determine. He sat up in his bed and listened. The quiet was as the silence in the chamber of death. He glanced toward his window. The moon had set and the early day was breaking. He tried to sleep again, but he and sleep had parted company, for that night at least, and he arose and going to the window thrust his head from the framed opening. The fresh sweet scents of the early morning filled his nostrils. The gravel of the terrace was wet, as if watered by human hands. There, far away across the outlying hills, he

saw the first pale tinge of the early sun, thrown over from above the sharp rise at the back of the chalet. A lone bird chirped faintly. Quentin leaned further out of the window and lost himself in a wondering reverie.

Why had he been led to this place? It was thus far mysterious and vague; delightful, certainly, but what had it to do with him? Why had he come here with no more knowledge of his hostess than that gained in a fortnight's semi-flirtation at a French watering place. He had never thought to ask of her belongings, they did not interest him, and she had not volunteered any information. He considered it but the pleasure of a passing hour, his acquaintance with Madame. Had she not written, pressing him to visit her at l'Abbaye de Bref, he would have gone to his home and forgotten all but the kindness that had made his stay at the seaside more than pleasant. Madame had spoken vaguely of "the General," and "the Count," and "the dear dead Duke," but then Quentin's environment had brought him into acquaintance with so many Generals and Counts, if not dear dead Dukes, and of the three he was not quite certain whether the first two were alive or not. Here was he, a guest in a house of whose inmates he knew nothing. He knew that he had discovered on the top of a high wall an elfish child named Gartha—a child who hated the French and was afraid of Revenants. He knew that he had seen a certain dark little lady who was short and stout, who wore a moustache which almost rivalled his own, and who shot a fine spray over his shirt bosom as she talked to him. He had sat for a time at a table with an Archbishop, who had remarked decidedly that some one had been unfrocked, a some

one in whom he took little interest. It was nothing to him if all the priests in France should be unfrocked. Probably there was as much blame on the one side as on the other. He had met a number of ladies and gentlemen, guests of the house, none of whose names he remembered, even if they had been mentioned. He had heard of a certain Bruno, who lived across the landing in those other rooms, presumably the counterpart of his own, but who was not an inmate of the Abbey at present. Above all he had seen a charming young creature whom they called Alixe. Gartha had exclaimed, "Oh! I love Alixe!" Here Quentin stood straight, awakened wide from his reverie. There was no more sleep for him. He walked across toward the door of his dressing room. He would take the bath neglected the night before, then go for a mountain scramble, and be ready for the strange new day that awaited him. Then there was that black robed figure, who had guided him to the gate, and had rung the bell. He remembered his face, dark, sallow. As these thoughts coursed through his brain he had drawn back the bolt of the dressing room door, and had opened it,—was this priest a man to fear? Or a man to—Quentin's glance crossed the bed. There lay the man of whom he had been thinking. His tonsured head was thrown back upon the pillow; his face was thin and lantern-jawed, but with a certain beauty of its own; the eyes were covered with lids which seemed to sink deep into the hollows of their sockets. The abandonment of the figure showed that the man was lost in a deep sleep. A thin hand lay outside the cover. Upon a chair was thrown a black robe, and upon the floor lay the sandals of a priest.

The man seemed to be about twenty-eight or thirty. He had a careworn look which Quentin felt made him seem older than his years. As Quentin backed softly, the priest moved in his sleep. He muttered some broken sentences. "No, no! Bruno," he said, "do not ask me. I cannot do it, even for——"

Quentin went out and softly closed the door.

II.

It was not more than five o'clock when Quentin descended the chalet stair. He asked of Pierre Monrouge, who was raking the gravel of the terrace, if he could get to the river.

"Does M'sieu then wish to get away?" asked Pierre Monrouge wondering, open-mouthed. "Did M'sieu then pass an unquiet night?"

"No, no, my good man. I want a plunge in the little stream."

"But M'sieu will take cold," returned Pierre Monrouge with that prudence which is ever present with the French peasant so far as water is concerned.

"I shall not take cold," laughed Quentin; "show me the way."

"M'sieu must have the key of the little door by the mill," said Pierre Monrouge. "I will get it for M'sieu. But I strongly advise the M'sieu against it. We take les grands bains, it is true, on several days in the year. On Ascension day, par example! Tout le monde takes them on Ascension day, and we immerse the whole body in water before other fête days; often in midsummer, but that is in a house, where the room has been warmed. To dip oneself in the cold water as it runs from the hills, it is indeed to tempt Providence, and——"

Quentin seized the key, and fairly ran away to

escape the voluble speech which Pierre Monrouge was pouring out upon him. He hastened along the path beneath the château walls, and was soon at the mill door.

He glanced as he ran at the ruin of the Abbey church, now showing rugged and grey in the early light, but a feeling of loyalty to Madame kept him from penetrating its interior. This was her present to him, his kind friend; the pleasure he was to experience within the next few days. She had expressed a wish to show him everything of interest, herself. He would not mar her kindly anticipations by so much as a glance.

A dip in the cool little stream which flowed just outside the Abbey walls in a world where he was the only soul awake, and a run back to the chalet, where he encased himself in fresh clothes, was the work of a half hour. Then the sun began to creep through the top of the pines which clothed the hill on the opposite side of the road.

Quentin again descended the chalet stairs, and went along the terrace toward the entrance gate. The grille was thrown back, the door was open, and Pierre Monrouge was sweeping away the ubiquitous dust of yesterday from the broad stone step.

"Can I get up the hill from here?" asked Quentin.

"The M'sieu has but to walk a little way back along the road, and he will find a path, a narrow little path, which leads up the hillside. But will not M'sieu have some coffee first?" inquired Pierre Monrouge. "Charles, is not the coffee ready?"

Charles, who had just come sleepily out from a door near the gate, looked in surprise at the strange Monsieur standing there, dressed for the day.

"M'sieu must be cold, the water must have chilled him," said Pierre Monrouge, who was apparently relieved to see Quentin in the flesh once more.

"I am not cold," said Quentin, laughing. "When is breakfast?"

"At all times, Monsieur," replied Charles, with a sigh of protest at the luxurious irregularity of the early family meal.

Quentin passed out of the gate, and walked back along the road that he had traversed the night before. A short distance from the château he passed an old iron door sunk in the wall. It had broad and strong hinges, which were yellow with rust, and large nails whose angular tops spoke plainly of a long past age. Quentin stood for a moment looking at the door. Then he glanced upward at the chalet underneath whose walls it was placed. He was satisfied that it was the door of which Madame had told him the night before, whose key was kept in the château, and at once the conviction forced itself upon his mind that it was through this door the priest must have entered to reach the small dressing room where he was now sleeping. If so, how had he obtained the key?

Quentin turned away from the mysterious door and mused as he walked onward. "Who has gone in and out of that door?" he thought. "What wary feet, what scheming heads, what black hearts, have made use of it, and for what purpose?" His mental questions were colored from a puritanical standpoint, but there was no one to answer them, and he proceeded upon his way.

He soon found himself in the little path of which Charles had spoken. Quentin at once took this foot-path, and was soon mounting the hill with easy

strides. When the path crossed the country road, he struck into that and walked on for nearly an hour, and when it was nearing half after six o'clock, he turned and retraced his steps. Walking for about an hour more, he came out upon the top of a hill. This hill, he supposed, must overlook the Abbey, but he had no way of ascertaining this fact. As he walked along the crest between the great giants of the wood, he emerged suddenly into a little glade. Here, to his surprise, his eye caught sight of a headstone. A headstone rather yellow and moss-grown, but it was evident that some one had lately been at work upon the inscription. A busy and faithful hand had been cleaning some of the letters, and Quentin, leaning down, read the word "General." Following this were the letters "Petr—" "So this was the resting place of the General! General Petrofsky, of whom Madame had spoken with so much widowed pride. There was a second headstone standing there, and Quentin made out upon it the name "Allaire Carleton, beloved wife of H. Valery, Esq., aged eighteen years and ten months." Beneath this again was carved the words, "She has found peace."

The glade was a nearly circular one. The absence of branches and leaves argued that it was carefully kept, but the grass was long and yellow, and waved in the breeze which crept through the wood. Quentin circled the glade about, but only the serried ranks of forest trees faced him as he tried in vain to peer between their trunks. Being a member of the Alpen Klub, a climber of repute and faithful to his cult, he was anxious to obtain a view as much as to get his bearings. As there seemed to be no way but one by which he could attain this object, he proceeded to

climb a low-branching tree, whose great height seemed to overlook the other denizens of the forest.

Quentin was soon at the top of the tree. Here his eye could range over the Valley of Moncousis, and down the hill upon the other side, along a second valley, of whose name he was ignorant. Just below him lay the Abbey, and far off, like a winding silver thread, ran the little stream, the "river" of Pierre Monrouge, in which he had taken his dip, now nearly three hours ago.

Quentin was lost in the beauty of the view. At his height he could hear nothing but the sighing of the soft morning air in the trees, and the twitter of the woodland birds. Suddenly he became conscious of a new feeling, a void, which only the coffee of Charles could satisfactorily supply. He had suddenly discovered that he was ravenously hungry. He started to descend, and as he proceeded he was conscious of a far voice calling. Was it for him? He listened. No! the name was "Alixe! Alixe!" The sound did not come to him unfamiliarly. It seemed as if he had been hearing that new, sweet name all the morning long.

When Quentin had descended half way to the ground, he seated himself for a few moments on an inviting branch. But for the noise of his own movements he might have heard the sweeping sound of a dress across the long grass of the glade where no footfall could be heard, while the rustle made by the skirt of the gown was loud enough to quench to the ear of its owner the noise made by his movements among the leaves. He did not hear the step which entered the glade beneath, nor the sigh of pleasure with which the tall figure sank down at the foot of the very tree

in which he was sitting. But he was aroused from his momentary reverie by hearing his own name. It was so sudden that there was nothing to do but remain quiet and hope that his presence would not be discovered.

"I came to speak to you about Mr. Quentin, Alixe; there must be no interference there!" It was Madame's voice. When her sentence was half finished Quentin was just about to cry out, "Oh! dear Madame, don't talk of me, or I shall hear no good of myself," but the second half of the sentence caused him to sit as if he were a part of the tree itself.

He glanced downward, and for the first time he was aware that the younger woman was reclining beneath the tree, his tree, and that he was stalled, so to speak, by her presence. Madame had evidently just followed Alixe into the glade and was standing facing her. She was panting breathlessly.

"I wish you not to interfere, do you hear? Not to interfere." The words had poured forth so rapidly that Quentin had no choice but to remain where he was.

Madame's tone was decidedly sharp and impatient.

"How can you stalk ahead so? Here I have been actually chasing you up the hill. Your stride is like a man's! I couldn't make you hear me, though I called and called! Now, do you hear, Alixe, I will have no interference with Mr. Quentin; he is my friend." There was an emphasis on the personal pronoun.

At the first sound of Madame's voice, Quentin had been minded to declare himself, but now he sat as if frozen to marble. The least word or sound from him

and he should be forced to forsake this Paradise within the hour.

"Interfere, mother? And why should I wish to interfere? The man is nothing to me! God knows that I have annoyances enough, without bringing others upon myself. I cannot very well go away, but I will shut myself up, if you wish."

"Absurd! Alixe. You know that those are things that you cannot do, we should have a fine scandal, but I wish you to understand that this is my own particular friend, and that the less you see of him——"

"Why should I see anything of him?" exclaimed Alixe with a tone and intonation that made Quentin's heart to fail. "I am sure that he has taken no notice of me, and probably will not. Don't be foolish, mother. Ignore me utterly, as probably he will, and as I shall ignore him."

Quentin in his amaze and mortification did not fail to note that the younger called the older woman "Mother," plain and simple. There was no playful "Mamasha" now, no "Madame," and no caress in the word which did duty for both.

"You remember Baron Olsten," continued Madame, in her high voice, which had suddenly become shrill and unpleasant, very different from the voice in which she had said "You dear!" to Quentin in the chalet rooms the night before. "You remember also perhaps Mr. Lauderdale, and the Marquis de Gelcon-court——"

"Was it my fault, mother? Their attentions were hateful to me."

"—And Mr. le Maurier——"

"Mother! he seemed to me more like a detective than anything else. He was so inquisitive and——"

"—And then there was Henry Ware."

"Mother! do not insult me! I never looked at the little man, I assure you. Why, moth——"

"Do say Mamasha!" said Madame, looking anxiously over her shoulder.

"Mamasha," said Alixe, with no change of tone, "I never looked at that underbred little man. Gartha caught some of his sayings, and I was obliged to correct her for it. I never object to your asking whom you will to the Abbey, but I must confess I was surprised when——"

"You seemed to be very attractive to him at least——"

"Mother! Mamasha! can I help that? I should not know Mr. Henry Ware if he were to walk into the glade this very moment."

"Well, he looked at you at all events."

"And can I help that? Do not annoy me with these silly and hateful suspicious about people in whom I take no interest. Do be more serious. Do respect me more. Remember the conditions which surround me, mother; you of all people in the world certainly should not forget." There was a piteous emphasis on the word "you." Quentin's heart sank still lower at these last words. "And if I am unfortunate enough to——" Alixe broke off and threw herself upon the grass, her face hidden in her hands.

"Oh, my dear God!" she cried aloud. "Was ever any poor creature more utterly alone in the world than I?"

"You are not alone, Alixe, if you would comport yourself like other people. You have Bruno."

"Bruno!" The word so uttered told Quentin more than an hour of explanation could have done.

Alixe sat upright and leaned her hand against the tree where Quentin was crouched above her. She turned about slowly and looked at Madame. Quentin found himself gazing down upon her as if he must read her very thoughts. He wished that he knew what was in that look to cause Madame to turn hurriedly away. Quentin was horribly conscious that he had tumbled upon a secret which was not intended for his ears. He was in terror for fear that some falling twig or leaf should cause one or the other to look upward.

Alixe withdrew her eyes from Madame and sat with her hat pushed back, her gaze fixed upon the white headstone where Quentin had read the name of Allaire Carleton, beloved wife of H. Valery, Esq. She absently pulled a stem of grass to pieces and threw the little blue blossoms on the ground.

Quentin's position, awkward at best, was becoming almost unbearable. He felt that if they did not soon go away he must discover himself and come down from the tree. Suddenly, to relieve the situation, the Abbey bell clanged out. The sound was sweet. It rang across the valley and up the hill. Madame turned away with an exclamation of annoyance.

"I had no idea that it was so late! Will you come down? Half past eight! What will they think of me?"

Alixe arose. She said nothing. She had taken off the Russian hat, and her head was bare. Quentin saw the sun shining on the full waves of her hair, and upon the silver combs pushed forward at the sides.

"Will you remember?" asked Madame, half turning at the edge of the glade.

"I will remember," answered Alixe.

Nothing more was said. Alixe paced slowly down the slope, her trailing robe rolling the falling leaves over and over with an early autumnal sound. Madame ran ahead, and was soon tick-tacking down the hard forest road.

When they were well out of sight and hearing, Quentin arose from his cramped posture in the tree. He descended slowly and dropped to the place where the young figure of Alixe had rested. He seated himself where she had sat, and picked up from the ground the blue-eyed grass which her long slim fingers had pulled unconsciously to pieces.

"Poor soul!" he said aloud. "Poor soul!" and was astonished to find that he had spoken. He put the blossom in his breast pocket, and then with a "Why not?" took it boldly out and thrust it within the buttonhole of his coat. Then he, in his turn, slowly descended the hill.

III.

When Quentin rang at the door in the wall and was admitted by Charles, he saw at a glance that there were not many persons at the table. He advanced along the terrace, curious to know who would be seated there. The Archbishop from his place upon Madame's right gave him a kindly, if a stately bow, and others nearer him looked up and bent their heads slightly. Alixe was in her seat at the farther end of the table, the Russian hat still upon her head, and Gartha was close beside her. Madame was voluble, and warmly welcoming. She pressed Quentin's hand. Alixe did not raise her eyes. She was engaged in preparing some food for Gartha. Many places were empty which Quentin remembered to have seen occupied the night before by prettily dressed and black-coated figures.

"The Baroness and Miss Thorndyke take their coffee in their rooms, Charles," said Madame. "Has Marie Monrouge served them? Mr. Le Brun and Mr. Jennings have gone to town, you know, your Grace, and Mrs. Jennings and her secretary never appear at early breakfast." Charles and Eugene were occupied in passing the cups of coffee which Madame was engaged in preparing, cups so large as to deserve the name of bowls. Great plates of bread were set at various places down the length of the table, and pitch-

ers of steaming chocolate at intervals, that each one might serve himself. Silver bowls and dishes, heaped high respectively with strawberries, sugar, and iced rolls of butter, held their own positions also, and bottles of St. Galmier and Evian were placed between every two of the guests.

"An egg?" asked Madame, in her sweetest of high voices, beaming brightly on Quentin.

"Two, please, or three!" said Quentin, endeavoring to smile so broadly as to feel certain, later, that he had overdone the effort to make his whereabouts of a half hour earlier unsuspected.

Charles opened his mouth and stood regarding the strange Monsieur.

"Two," he said. "Or even three!" He went toward the door which opened into the kitchen. "Two or even three. The hens of the Château Bref lay but one egg at a time. Two, or even three! Does the strange Monsieur imagine that the cuisine of the Château Bref holds three eggs for each guest. Sixty eggs in a morning? Two, or even three. Oh! mon Dieu!"

Quentin applied himself to his breakfast with the devotion of a starved pedestrian.

There was no sound for a few moments but the trickling of coffee into the great colored bowls, or Eugene's "Sucre, Monsieur? Sucre, Madame? Café au lait, Monsieur? Ah! du noir! Bien, Monsieur, bien! *C'est ça!*"

The silence was broken by a footstep overhead. Then a sound as if a chair had suddenly fallen. Quentin involuntarily raised his eyes. As he did so, he caught sight of Alixe rising abruptly from her seat at the further end of the table. She stood for a

moment, irresolute, listening, and then sat down again.

"Who is in Monsieur Quentin's rooms, Eugene?" asked Madame in her high key.

"It is no one, Mamasha." Alixe had again arisen. "Rather, I will go and see if Mr. Quentin will allow me."

"Sit still, Alixe," called Madame, with heightened color, "and do take off that dreadful hat."

"It—it—is the—other—maid," stammered Quentin, arraying himself unconsciously on what he felt at once to be the side of Alixe.

"We have no other maid but Nanette. She is Alixe's maid. Perhaps Henri went up to——"

Alixe with no reply to Madame had left her chair and was now at the chalet stairs.

Quentin arose also with a careless "I will go and see," and followed slowly to the archway. Madame looked annoyed and half arose, but at the Archbishop's calm "Do not disturb yourself, my friend," she seated herself. Quentin thought that he knew the cause of Alixe's disappearance, though he hardly knew why he was following her. He mounted the stairs lingeringly, reached the floor of his bedroom and haltingly entered.

The door which led into the dressing room was unbolted. He paused, then passed with increasing hesitancy toward the doorway. He wished to be within call should he be needed, and yet, he was not at home; a stranger here. He listened, but heard no voices. He entered the middle room; it was empty. As he halted, again irresolute, Alixe came hastening toward him from the third room, the so-called closet. She breathed as if she had been running. She had a key

in her hand. She walked swiftly through the disordered rooms, Quentin following her. She paused for a moment on the landing outside his door.

"I—I—thought that Mamasha had put you in the left wing," she said. "I made a mistake. I hope that you will pardon it."

"Pardon? Pardon what, Mad——"

"All," she replied. She gave him a look pregnant with meaning and hastened down the stairs.

As Quentin again took his seat, he heard Alixe laughing gayly. Perhaps it was his late experience which made the laughter seem forced to him.

"Only the same old thing, Mamasha," she called down the length of the table. "I hardly know whether it is the wind or the rats, and in broad daylight too!"

"I will answer for it that there is no rat behind your arras, Madame," said the Archbishop, smiling at his neighbour.

"Holà! Holà! What a fine company have we here! And, pray, who are all these good people?"

There was a slight suspicion of an Hibernian accent in the good natured tone.

"Valery!" said Madame in an explanatory whisper to the Archbishop. "Bear with him if you can, your Grace."

"The Rastaquouère?" asked the Archbishop under his breath, with an indulgent smile. "I am delighted! I am in luck!"

"Yes," said Madame, with a sigh of pity for herself, "the Rastaquouère!"

"Papachen! papachen!" It was Gartha who had arisen from her chair and had flown at this bird of gorgeous plumage. "When did you get here? You said you would come back last night."

"Petite polissonne, come back to your eating," screamed Mademoiselle, who loved to air her English.

The new arrival sauntered up to the table. The sweetest of odours came with him, preceded him almost.

"I hate a perfumed man," said Madame in an undertone to Quentin.

"You promised to come back last night, Valery," said Gartha; "I watched and watched——"

"So I did, little one, but, you know, I was born to break promises."

He seated himself as near Alixe and as far from Madame as circumstances would permit.

"He doesn't wear an electric light in his scarf pin," whispered Miss Jenkins to Quentin. "I am so disappointed! I had at the least expected that! You know, like the little man who goes round thimble-rigging in the Paris cafés."

"I don't know this gentleman as well as I do the other," answered Quentin, "but I should say that he was a touch above that."

"Well, I suppose there is no one who has not a mission in life," returned the speaker, "either consciously or unconsciously. His seems to be to keep other men up to the mark in the way of neatness of person and dress. Heaven forbid that they should emulate his magnificence and variety of color and adornment."

"Gorgeous being, though, he is," broke in Mary Thorndyke; "there is nothing, well, what you would call common about him; he is——"

"Most uncommon, I should say," returned Miss Jenkins.

He was a butterfly of the first and clearest water, this Rastaquouère. He was immaculate. Most men appear fresh and spotless on a summer morning, but the dazzling snowiness of the newcomer's linen caused each man at the table to cast a hasty glance downward at his own shirt front. The waistcoat of the newcomer was of pale green, ornamented with large white pearl buttons, and was crossed by a conspicuously heavy chain of gold. His light grey coat was of thin flannel, and his white trousers were of the same material. Upon his feet he wore low shoes of fine russet leather, and when he moved sufficiently his yellow socks, clocked with blue, showed a studied care for his entire person. His necktie of delicate pink, his sleeve links, his studs, the middle one of which showed a large opal set with diamonds, his finger rings, which were many and blazed like the constellations of the heavens, his almost crimson face, short nose, china blue eyes, and red, well kept moustache, plentifully sprinkled with grey, made a combination not easily forgotten.

Gartha struggled at once with sinuous persistent motion up to his knees, and wound her arms round his large neck, thereby disarranging the necktie, and creasing the waistcoat, which had heretofore sat so smoothly over the portly figure beneath.

The newcomer sat patiently, while the child caressed him, pulling his moustache apart that she might imprint a kiss directly upon his lips; drawing from his well-kept fingers his many gorgeous and enormous rings, and hanging them upon her own little paws, from which they fell one after the other; jerking his heavy watch from his pocket, and putting it to her ear, insisting upon knowing what was the time in

Africa at the moment. Then denuding him of the chain also, she hung it round her own brown neck. Suddenly the victim lifted the jewel-bedecked little creature from his knee, seated her on the gravel beside his chair, and held out his bowl for some coffee.

There was silence for a while, disturbed only by the breaking of an egg, or a murmured sentence, from some one, in the ear of a near neighbour.

Valery set down his empty cup. "How Alixe spoils you!" said he, looking down on the dark little head by his side.

Gartha arose and stood by the table, glittering like the Queen of Sheba.

"You spoil her, Valery," said Alixe, laughing.

"So does every one," said Valery, in a pleasant, tolerant voice.

"You spoil me yourself, Alixe," said Gartha. "Mamasha says you do."

"I like to spoil you," said Alixe. "You are the only one I have to spoil."

"Did you never have a little girl of your own, Alixe?" asked Gartha.

"No," answered Alixe, unembarrassed by this pointed question and looking straight into Gartha's eyes. "If I had, I should have wanted her to be just like Gartha." At this compliment Gartha laughed gayly.

There was a short silence, broken in a moment by Gartha.

"Valery," she said, "what is a Rastaquouère?"

Valery set down his second cup carefully, wiped his moustache and leaned back so far that there seemed to be danger of his going over on to the gravel behind him. He turned his head toward the end of the table

where Madame, having caught the question, sat looking down and growing somewhat red.

"Mamasha," he called, "you taught her that."

"I did not, Valery," came back in Madame's high key.

"Well, then, she heard you say it."

"I am not responsible for all that Gartha hears, Valery. Alixe indulges the child to such an extent——"

"But she heard you say it, Mamasha. Now, didn't she?"

The Archbishop's keen eyes were fixed on Madame.

She hesitated—"Well, well—" she finally answered —"and are you not, Valery, dear?"

"You made her think it a term of reproach, Mamasha."

"Oh, no, no! Valery, dear," called Madame down the vista of glass and silver. "But—but—and isn't it—well, you know—rather—Valery, dear?"

"Rather what? A term of reproach? No; I have had no cause to think so, Mamasha, me jool! and neither will you when you see into my boxes. Don't you think your views are somewhat—ah—colored by circumstances? Oh, fie! Mamasha; oh, fie!"

Valery's comic tone of reproof brought a smile, if a concealed one, to every lip. It somewhat disconcerted Madame. She was put so entirely in the wrong before those with whom she wished to seem entirely in the right. She glanced at Quentin, who was smiling more at Valery's manner and brogue than at the subject of his words. She reached out her hand, hastily seized a glass of water and as hurriedly swallowed it.

"Poor old Mamasha!" said Valery.

Madame's cheek flushed, but she made some trivial remark to the Archbishop, and then turned to Quentin.

"You have no idea what the care of such a house as this entails upon me, Mr. Quentin," she said.

"Dear old Mamasha!" exclaimed Valery again.

"I am sure you are more than good to ask us all here and give yourself so much trouble about us," replied Quentin.

She turned a pleased face toward him.

"Dear friend," she said, "you are too kind."

Meanwhile Gartha was clamoring: "Your boxes! Your boxes! When are they coming? When are they coming?"

"They *are* coming," said Valery, resuming his interrupted meal.

The Archbishop leaned forward with interest.

"Boxes?" he said. "Ha—hum! Boxes? He is a good son of the church, is he not, Madame?"

"I wish that Alixe were as good a daughter," said Madame.

"They are talking about us down there," said Gartha, in plainly audible tones.

The Archbishop cleared his throat in a politely repressed manner.

"I—I—was saying to—to—ahem! your aunt, my dear, that I wish your—the Duchess were as good a daughter of the church as your father is a son."

"Aunt!" exclaimed Valery in an undertone. "Aunt, eh! That's a new reading," and then in a voice that caused his neighbor, the Baroness, to wince, as if at the sound of a drum, "that's what I'm always telling her, your Grace. Isn't it, Alixe?"

"Yes, you are certainly!" smiled Alixe.

"I wish that you were a daughter of Mother Church," repeated the Archbishop.

"The old question, your Grace," said Alixe, looking brightly at him.

"She shall be in time, your Grace," said Madame, assuringly.

"Do not make any promises for me, Mamasha," said Alixe, with great seriousness. "It is all that I can do to keep my own promises."

Quentin's eyes were drawn to where Alixe sat. It seemed to him that all eyes were attracted toward her, that at whichever end she seated herself, that end must ever be the head of the table. She sat, her elbows, from which the loose sleeves had fallen away, resting on the board before her, her fingers clasped underneath a very determined looking chin. He mentally decided that here was a personality which no one could coerce, least of all Madame, Madame with her weak, pretty mouth, and her sweetly shrill or petulant tones, according as to who there was to hear.

To Quentin it seemed as if Madame were ever silently apologizing to this tall girl called Alixe, who never reproached her. The younger woman met the elder ever with a pleasant smile. She said little about the orders for the household—in fact, she did not interfere. Madame was apparently the mistress here.

He wondered why the younger woman did not show her splendid height. She was taller than any woman there; as tall as most men. Quentin's fine height of an inch over six feet did not look down upon her by more than three inches. She carried her shoulders drawn upward. Her head a little down drooped, but occasionally, when for some reason she seemed to forget herself in admiration of a thrilling tale, or in an

involuntary greeting to a friend, she raised her head and straightened herself to her full height.

"Gartha, take your arms off the table," said Valery.

"But Alixe—" began Gartha.

"Alixe is different," said Valery.

Alixe was lost in thought. She did not appear conscious of the discussion, and Quentin acknowledged to himself that all that she did was indeed done with a difference.

"How many nationalities are represented round this table!" remarked Miss Thorndyke.

"Yes," said Miss Spencer, "and in France, too, and not one Frenchman or woman present—if we except the servants, to be sure."

"His Grace," said Alixe, looking up, "you forget him."

"Oh, yes! The Archbishop, certainly."

"And the Baroness," said Valery.

"She is an Italian," said Miss Spencer.

"And Mademoiselle," said Valery.

"Yes, but no more."

"And my Uncle Bruno," said Gartha. "Ah, bah! how I hate my Uncle Bruno!"

Every one but Alixe showed their amusement by laughing at Gartha's speech.

"Why do you give me an *oeillade* like that, Alixe?"

"You are in your Uncle Bruno's house, Gartha," said Alixe, gravely. "He need not be included."

"Dieu merci!" said Gartha openly.

"'Bruno's house!' I like that!" said Valery aside to Miss Spencer.

Gartha, opening her eyes very wide, exclaimed, "I thought it was Mamasha's! Nom de Dieu!"

"So every one thinks," confided Valery to Miss

Spencer, "and the funny part of it is she never contradicts 'em. I think she has begun to believe it herself."

"Bruno's!" returned Miss Spencer in an undertone, which was full of subtle meaning. "That is too good."

"Your Uncle Bruno is not a Frenchman," said Miss Thorndyke; "he is a Spaniard!"

"If Bruno had had his way," continued Miss Spencer in Valery's ear, "there wouldn't be much of it left by now. I hear that before Mamasha married him to Alixe he had dissipated half the property."

"She needs a guardian," said Valery. "They all do, in fact, Mamasha as well as the rest of 'em." He looked down at the tablecloth. "I see she's got a new one," he said in an undertone behind his moustache.

"She is always getting a new one," returned Miss Spencer, watching Alixe to see that she did not hear.

"He's a well set-up chap. Where did she pick him up?"

"At some watering place, I believe."

"That's where she always gets 'em," said Valery. "She corresponds with 'em and gets 'em down here, and then makes 'em fetch and carry, but, then, she's still a fairly good-looking little woman by lamplight and under a veil, is Mamasha."

"She has a phenomenal back," acquiesced Miss Jenkins. "You might take her for nineteen if you walk behind her. How old is she, Mr. Valery?"

"Who? Mamasha? Let — me — see. Mamasha must be—well, Mamasha must be all of forty-three; she was married at seventeen. Yes, that's gospel, I know it."

"You were talking of the nationalities represented here," said Miss Thorndyke from across the table, breaking in on this confidential conversation. "Almost every known nationality. Russian——"

"Where is a Russian?" asked Valery.

"Madame."

"Oh, is she a Russian?"

"Is she not?"

"American, pure and simple."

"Where does she get her accent then?" whispered Miss Spencer.

"Where she gets most of the rest of her make-believes," confided Valery, who was chafing under Madame's ridicule of him. "Where she gets her lisp and her baby ways. They take some people in, but they can't——"

"I'm an American girl," said Miss Thorndyke, who looked much older than Madame, "but I'm often taken for English."

"Girl, I think you said?" inquired the Rastaquouère. "Oh, I was only rounding out your sentence for you," as he saw the angry glance which Miss Thorndyke flashed back at him. "Well, I'm never taken for an Englishman, thank God."

"No, you would hardly be that," returned Miss Thorndyke, eyeing him critically.

"See that now! Talk to a woman about her a——"

Here Valery was interrupted, much to Miss Thorndyke's relief.

Gartha was standing by Valery's side. She leaned over and looked proudly up and down the table.

"Rastaquouère," she said, "is only my Papa's branche de commerce—affaire, occupation, ah, bah!

How I hate that French. His real name is Hilary Valery."

"It might as well be Alibone-crackibone!" said Madame in a low tone to Quentin, who found himself smiling at the quaint conceit. "Valery's name always reminds me of the way American children do what they call 'counting out,'" continued Madame, who had a humor of her own and a grudge against the subject of her remarks.

"*One*ery—*two*ery—*zick*ery—*zan*—*Hil*ery—*Val*ery—*Don't—you—know!*"

Quentin was tempted to burst into hilarious laughter, but the proprieties permitted only a contraction of the corners of his mouth. The last words were jerked out by Madame with the same emphasis as those which had preceded them. The Archbishop leaned toward the reciter trying to follow her. He knew a little English, but his acquaintance was with English books and not with the language fluently spoken, least of all with American jokes.

"Je ne comprends pas," he said, with a puzzled look.

Madame repeated her words, but they were as the language of the Chinese to the prelate's unaccustomed ear. Whereupon Madame entered into a lengthy explanation in French, in which she was quite at home. The Archbishop was a close listener to the painstaking sentences of Madame. When she came to the words "Alibone-crackibone" he laughed irrepressibly, repeating the sounds several times, rolling them over upon his tongue with gusto.

"They are laughing at us down there," said Gartha to her father. Then, raising her voice and looking at

Madame defiantly, she added, "It is a beautiful name, though Mamasha thinks No."

"So it is, dear!" said Alixe, patting Gartha's little brown claw.

"You lose, Mamasha," shouted Valery along the vista of bowls and syphons.

"That dreadful man!" murmured Madame. Then in a louder tone, "So it is, Gartha dear!"

"You win, dear old Mamasha," shouted Valery again.

"Don't wait," said Madame, bowing down the table, uncertain what turn Valery's remarks would take next. "Breakfast is an informal meal, you know." Most of the seats were vacated at the permission so graciously given, the guests sauntering along the terrace by twos and threes.

IV.

QUENTIN found himself standing at the open grille, in front of which the carriage was waiting. "Parkere," the English coachman, whom Quentin shortly discovered was saluted in his own country by the name of Barker, sat on the box, whip in hand, stiff as a statue. Occasionally, it is true, he permitted himself a little liberty, somewhat relaxing his truly British vertebræ, for what did them Frenchies h'understand of coachmen, and what did they compre'end of 'osses he would like to know? Barker had been degraded into the cinnamon-colored coat so dear to the hearts of the Parisian noblesse, and how could he have the moral courage to preserve the stolidity of the imported English coachmen, when his mongrel appearance was so decidedly against the supposition that he was one of them?

"Parkere est smart, très smart," remarked the Baroness. The Baroness, if reduced to making interminable visits to her wealthy friends, so that Monsieur le Baron need not be docked of his daily glasses of absinthe as he sat in front of Maxim's, got a sort of equivalent from those loiterings of his which was the bringing home to her by the Baron of the latest Parisian slang learned at Maxim's and which she could retail to her friends.

"Holloa! that's my old friend Barker!" exclaimed

Valery. "Barker, your horses are too fat. All French horses are too fat except those little rats on the Champs Elysées."

Barker smiled appreciatively and commendingly.

Valery stood contemplating the carriage, the horses, the coachman, all got up in the very latest French idea of style.

"Who are those people over across the valley, Barker?" asked he. "Those who drive such a swell turnout?"

"Dose vith ze boule dogue," added the Baroness.

"I believe they did have a bull dog. They were what you would call très smart, Baroness. Who are they, Barker?"

Barker turned fraternally toward this Irish gentleman who knew what good horses were.

"You wouldn't know 'em, sir," he said.

"I wouldn't know 'em? Indeed, then, would I. They might give me a mount now and then."

"No, sir!" reiterated Barker. "You wouldn't know 'em. There's plenty of mounts in h'our stables, sir. You wouldn't know them parties, sir. They jobs their 'osses, sir."

Valery chuckled. "I job my own," he said, "when I have any."

Barker allowed the iron in his back to relax. He leaned slightly toward the Rastaquouère and said, "Mr. Valery, sir, can I speak with you a minute?"

The men were putting the Archbishop's modest luggage on behind.

"What is it, Barker? Don't they pay you enough? That's Madame. You must go to the Duchess, she——"

Barker leaned down confidentially, if stiffly.

"H'I asks you as a gentleman, Mr. Valery, who know what things is, not as h'I hever wishes to complain, but h'I asks you as a gentleman, in confidence, if you really do think they pays me enough, an' me wearin' a coat like that"—Barker stretched out his arm and contemplated its cinnamon colored covering.

Valery took the coachman in with critical, comprehensive look.

"Barker," he said finally, with solemn tone, "it would be hard to keep one's self unspotted of the world in such a coat as that. It is—really—awful! A man loses his self respect——"

"Yes, sir, an' takes to drink an' loses control of the 'osses."

"I should resign from the British House of Lords if I were forced to wear such a coat as that. Be patient until I have a talk with Madame, and when you come back from the station, I will tell you her verdict."

"A cinnamon top-coat," said Valery, laughing over Barker's confidences a little later. "You can fairly smell him. 'Isles of the Blest,' and all that sort of thing. 'Where Africa's spicy breezes blow soft o'er Ceylon's isle.' They'd put him in a show in London."

"What is it?" Madame asked of Charles, who was standing persistently behind her chair, and interrupting her last words with the Archbishop, for they had been left alone at the table.

"The carriage for his Grace, Madame."

"Is the luggage in?" asked Madame.

"'Must I thus leave thee, Paradise?'" quoted the prelate regretfully. "Is it possible that my hour has

come?" He arose and walked to the edge of the terrace. He stood looking down for a moment on the ruin, and the valley, now smiling in the sunshine. Then he turned to Madame, who had followed him.

"Will you send the Duchess here?" he said.

Madame approached Alixe, who was standing, with Gartha hanging to her arm, a little further along the terrace.

Alixe turned at once, and Quentin fancied that she cast a half perceptible glance at him, but he did not move toward her, neither did he follow her with his eyes.

Some of the guests had seated themselves beneath the broad tree under which Quentin had seen Madame and the Archbishop talking on the previous night. Valery, returning from his conference with Barker, suddenly seized Gartha up from the ground. She struggled violently, to the great disarrangement of her clothing. Some of the rings slipped off her fingers and rolled in the gravel.

"I hate money for money's sake," said Madame in a low tone to Quentin, whom she had joined. He hardly heard what she had said. He was unconsciously straining his ears for a word from that tall pair standing beyond the great tree's shade. The sun shone down on them and enveloped them with a brightness which was dazzling. Finally, they began to move slowly toward the entrance gate. Quentin caught some low indistinct words as they passed him by. He thought that they sounded like "I cannot promise."

Whereupon the Archbishop bowed a cold good-bye to Alixe, took Madame's soft, warm hand in his own and held it just a moment longer than friendliness re-

quired, pressed something into the palm of Charles, and was gone. As he disappeared, Madame called to the Rastaquouère.

"Valery," she said sharply, "I wish you would come here a moment."

"Dear old Mamasha can't live without her youngest, can she?" said Valery, raising his weighty figure out of the easy chair, where he had just seated himself, to enjoy his cigar with the men of the party. He approached Madame slowly, keeping his cigar alight, but when he reached the place where she was standing, holding it down under cover of his hand.

"What is it, Mamasha?" asked he good naturedly.

"Valery, there is one habit that I wish you would break yourself of." Madame spoke sharply. There was a red spot on each soft cheek.

"Gracious! How handsome you look, Mamasha. I have half a mind to kiss you." Madame, somewhat mollified, continued:

"I do wish, Valery, that you would not address me as you do."

"How? Mamasha? *Always* called you Mamasha. Thought you liked it. We're both too old to change now, I fancy. What shall I call you. Moth——"

Madame's brow had grown darker with each succeeding word of his speech.

"No! No! No! Don't be stupid. You wilfully misunderstand me, I think, sometimes."

"What's the woman driving at!" exclaimed the culprit, gazing about him with a mystified air.

"You know what you said, perfectly, Valery."

"When?"

"At breakfast."

"I said, poor, dear Mamasha."

"No, Valery, you did not. It is the other adjective which you used to which I seriously object."

"I didn't say damn, did I?" asked Valery, all innocence.

"No, Valery, you did not. Offensive as such words are to me, that would have been much less offensive thanwh at you did say. You said 'dear old Mamasha, poor old Mamasha.' I have said before that I dislike this mode of address."

"Why! I say 'poor old Alixe,' often," said Valery, justifying himself as best he could, "and I have even been known to say 'dear old Gartha.'"

"Very well! If they like it; but I must say that I do not."

"Do you mind if I say 'dear little Mamasha,' or 'poor little Mamasha?'"

"No, Valery, not in the least. It is the adjective, as I told you, which makes all the difference. Now, I beg of you, remember."

"I will remember, Mamasha, certainly," replied her son-in-law, as he retraced his steps to the seat from which she had summoned him. His words were not very distinguishable, for he was endeavoring to relight his cigar by drawing upon the end between his lips. He repeated, as if learning a lesson, "The adjective must not agree with the object to whom it is applied, or the object will seriously disagree with me."

"Will you come to my room, Alixe?" said Madame as Valery walked away.

"Had you not better come to mine?" returned Alixe in the tone of one who preferred her own vantage ground. Madame, seeming vanquished already, acquiesced.

"That dreadful room with the iron doors!" said Miss Spencer, with a becoming shudder. "Have you ever seen it, Mr. Quentin?"

Quentin, who was in no mood for a morning tête-à-tête with Miss Spencer, answered "No" almost shortly, and sauntered away, his hands in his pockets. He loitered about the further end of the terrace for a half hour, talking with no one, smoking violently, wondering when Madame would come to redeem her promise and show him the ruins, wondering also whether she had taken Alixe away to coerce her into the Archbishop's desires. Finally Gartha came flying along the esplanade. She came abruptly up to Quentin.

"Mamasha says that she has mal à la tête—Ah, bah! that French!—ache in the head, and cannot come down again this morning."

"That child's manners leave much to be desired," remarked Miss Spencer in an audible tone. Miss Spencer was making a water color of the Abbey. She had moved her easel nearer Quentin's end of the terrace.

"Trees are green, not blue," said Gartha, glancing over Miss Spencer's shoulder. Then, looking at Quentin, "Valery will come to take you for the fishing."

"I'm sure that it is very kind of your father——" began Quentin.

"Oh, don't mention it," shouted the Rastaquouère, as he issued from the little door near the gate.

Quentin remembered to have once gone in New York to see a so-called "lightning-change artist," and as he surveyed Valery's very appropriate fishing costume, he could not help a feeling of wonder as to whether

he had made his fortune in that way. He found his new acquaintance a jolly, good natured soul, with plenty of Irish wit, much shrewdness, and a genuine love of sport. The talk was principally of fish and their habits, but, though the two anglers whipped the stream, they found little to reward their endeavors. The day was too sunny, Valery declared. The headache of Madame he commented on freely—too freely, Quentin thought, to an entire stranger like himself, but these comments met with no response from him. He could but be amused at Valery's frankness, although he was not of the sort who discuss one's host with comparative strangers, or, in fact, with any one.

V.

A PAIR of hungry men entered the door of the château as the breakfast bell clanged forth its grateful summons. It seemed to Quentin as he ran along toward his rooms to make himself presentable that these people were forever occupied in the business of eating. He came down to find Madame seated at her place, smiling, but somewhat red about the eyes. The guests came straggling along, one or two at a time. Alixe was in her seat opposite Madame, at the extreme end of the table. Gartha was in hers, and across from Gartha upon the right of Alixe sat a black robed figure. It was the priest whom Quentin had seen twice before during his short stay, once upon the road, and again asleep in the mysterious little dressing room. The breakfast was but just under way when Valery came walking quickly from the château along the terrace. He was, as ever, immaculate, but the pale green waistcoat had given way to a knitted one of chocolate and rose, the pink cravat to one of blue, the red shoes to shoes of tan, and the suit to a combination of white duck and a light brown frock coat. This was not altogether so startling a costume as the one of the early morning, but picturesque in its way.

"Holà! Bob, how are you?" nodded Valery, ex-

tending his left hand unceremoniously to the priest. "Can't take a meal, it seems, without some of your craft to bless the food. Had his Grace at early breakfast."

The priest dropped Valery's hand, started, and looked at Alixe.

"It is true," she said, "but he has returned to Paris."

Just here there was heard the sound of approaching wheels along the road from the direction of Moncousis.

"His Grace returning," shrieked Madame, looking at Alixe with a helpless, frightened stare.

The priest started, and at once stood up, holding by the back of his chair, turning his eyes undecidedly from one to the other.

"Get down! Get down behind the table!" shrilled Madame. "He must not find you here."

There was a confused sound of voices. Quentin stood regarding the priest with interest to see what he would do. The vehicle drew up at the gate. There was a clang at the bell.

"Get down! Get down!" again excitedly called Madame, in a whisper that could have been heard at the entrance. "He has only come back for something he has forgotten. He will not stay."

"Perhaps he has lost his train," said Valery.

"Alixe, what did I tell you? *What* did I tell you?" tearfully said Madame. "I expected exactly some such thing, and after I promised! *What* a contretemps!"

Eugene ran to open the gate.

"Down! Do you hear me? Robert, get down!" called Madame again.

"How I shall despise him," thought Quentin, "if he hides himself behind those women!"

The priest stood uncertain, irresolute, as if not knowing what to do, but at a decided "You will not get down! Stand your ground! You are my guest. No one has the right——" from Alixe, he straightened himself, and stood, pale and handsome, looking defiantly around him.

Valery had left his chair and had advanced toward the gate.

"What a commotion all about nothing," he called back to them. "It's only my boxes."

At these reassuring words Madame was herself again.

The priest reseated himself, and the meal progressed, though not quite as if nothing had happened. There seemed to be a feeling of constraint among the guests, and some of them glanced distrustfully at Father Halle.

When the long dejeuner was finished, Madame took Quentin a little apart.

"I was sorry to disappoint you this morning," said she, "but I am not feeling quite well." The pretty blue eyes filled with tears. "Were you ever misunderstood? It is dreadful to be misunderstood. It seems as if I were forever being misunderstood. Do not misunderstand me, my friend."

"I could not," answered Quentin fervently, forgetting everything for the moment but the tearful, pleading eyes.

"Just now in the heat of the day every one goes off for a siesta. You must go and rest yourself, my friend. I will send you some books and La Nouvelle Revue. I must see to the unpacking of Valery's

boxes. He is sure to make a litter. They are so thoughtless, those wanderers. Later, I will show you the ruin. I will send Charles to call you at five, when tea is ready."

Quentin felt like a bad child to be sent off to bed in this way. He would have been glad to aid the Rastaquouère in his unpacking or to do anything to while away the time, but he had not been invited to do so, and he thought it rather soon to offer his services. The various women disappeared within the great doors of the château. The men, most of whom he characterized in his thoughts as "popinjays," walked lazily off, their cigarettes alight. He saw Mademoiselle pass along the terrace holding Gartha's hand, a pile of books under her arm; and he also saw two other figures vanish along the shaded walk of the flower garden. They were the two figures which he had seen on the evening of his arrival. Was it only the previous evening? He could not have believed that so much could have happened in so short a time. He turned away to the seclusion of his rooms, feeling strangely lonely, feeling that his visit had been a mistake perhaps, and that a convenient telegram from Paris, in answer to a letter from himself, written that evening, should take him away as soon as possible.

VI.

Quentin went up the chalet stairs. He threw himself lazily upon the low, old fashioned couch. There was a knock at the door. It was Pierre Monrouge with an armful of books. Quentin chose the "Pierre Nosière" of Anatole France, and had soon forgotten his annoyance in those first pages of the early reminiscences of a child of five years. "Charming! Charming!" he murmured; his eyelids closed upon a moving panorama of Noah and his wife, his sons and their wives, followed by all the animals of the clan issuing from the ark, the final figure being Joseph, who had escaped from his captors and was anachronically making a low bow to the patriarch, and saying, "Bonjour, Monsieur. Bonjour! C'est encore moi, Monsieur. C'est encore moi!" Quentin awoke with a start, to find that Joseph had been metamorphosed into Pierre Monrouge, who was bowing low and saying that "Feefe o'clock" was ready, and would the Monsieur have the bonté to join Madame?

Quentin made a hasty toilet and emerged upon the terrace, for the twentieth time, it seemed to him, since his arrival. He approached the long table within the recess underneath the chalet, but it was bare of cloth, or porcelain. He saw at once that this was not to be his objective point, and passed onward toward the door of the salon. The room was empty, there was

an absence of sound. The whole place seemed deserted.

He approached a window and looked down upon the garden beneath, and now he thought that he heard the sound of far away voices. He was not a man to seek for neglect, but surely, he thought, a little more attention might have been paid to so utter a stranger as himself. He wandered out of the salon again, and on to the terrace, hot with the glare of the afternoon sun. As he did so, Charles came out of the little door near the gate. He was dressed in afternoon costume of knee breeches, white stockings, plush coat, etc.; he carried a large, silver tray, on which was an old-fashioned tea-service, and Eugene, similarly metamorphosed, followed, with a second tray piled high with bread, butter, plates, napkins, and steaming covered dishes.

They crossed the terrace and descended from sight, lost beneath an archway of greenery. Quentin followed, and found that near the corner of the château and opposite the entrance door and grille, was a broad flight of stone steps. They were delightful old steps—the balustrade of stone, the rail of stone, but so overgrown with vines as to almost conceal the nature of their material. Quentin descended slowly. This was a place of surprises. He would loiter and take it all in as he went. When he reached the bottom of the steps, he found himself upon a path so overgrown and cool that it bore a resemblance to a tunnel of closely growing vines. The flower garden lay upon his right, the fields upon his left. In the perspective, where the white legs of Charles had just vanished, he saw some gray stone work, and an opening between gray walls, and within, pale shades of

filmy stuffs, of pink or blue or white, passing and repassing across the opening. There was the sound of pleasant, well-bred laughter. A bit of verse came into his mind which caused him to smile at his own gratuitous estimate of people whom he scarcely knew:

"And their voices low with fashion, not with feeling, softly freighted
All the air about the windows with elastic laughter sweet."

Quentin took a few steps forward, emerged from the tunnel of green, and found himself standing between four gray walls, whose ruined arches and pillars upheld no roof-tree. The Abbey church was open to the sky. Great oaks, which had grown for generations in the centre of this delicious spot, proved by their presence how ancient the building must be, since they could not have sprouted until years after the place had been given over to decay, and the roof had fallen in from disuse and neglect.

The contrast between the rugged old ruin and the modern butterflies disporting themselves therein struck Quentin with a sort of incongruous picturesqueness. The picture overbalanced the incongruity within his mind, and, as he came forward, his good nature quite restored, through his delight in the scene, he unconsciously murmured again: "Charming! Charming!"

Madame was seated at a large rustic table before the tray which the plush-coated Charles had just deposited. Eugene had likewise set down his burden and both men, with the dexterity which accompanies long-accustomed service, were arranging the table to suit Madame's convenience and wishes. The guests were seated here and there, either on low growing

branches, or about in nooks and corners upon great blocks of the old ruin, which had fallen from their places, perhaps generations ago, to thus be utilized, some persons might say desecrated, in this mundane end of the nineteenth century.

"Welcome! Welcome!" cried Madame gayly to Quentin. "Come over here by me. I have hardly seen you. You have hidden yourself away so."

Quentin smiled broadly at these words, for he had simply followed Madame's orders.

"People certainly take their own way of amusing themselves at the Abbey," said Miss Spencer. "Where have you been all day, Mr.—Mr.——"

"Quentin. Mr. Quentin," supplied Madame. "I thought I introduced you this— Do you take sugar, Baroness? I always forget——"

"Fishing all the morning," laughed Quentin, casting sleepy eyes downward, "and sleeping all the afternoon."

"Why!" exclaimed Miss Spencer, with a catch in her breath. "Didn't you sleep well last night?"

"Perfectly well," Quentin replied, "but I have been travelling more or less uncomfortably, and perhaps the change to this pure air——"

"And why should not Mr. Quentin sleep well, Ada Spencer?" asked Madame, impatiently.

"He should, he should, dear Madame," replied Miss Spencer, hastily; and then, changing the subject, "the Baroness and I have been sketching all the morning. We could not leave to come home, the light was so delicious, so we took some milk at a farm house. We got home in time only to dress. See how sunburned I am. The Baroness is a fright," she added, with that disregard of the dependent friend,

titled or untitled, which is a characteristic of modern society.

"Valery says you improve on Nature," remarked Gartha, who was everywhere as usual.

"Yes, we sometimes improve on Nature," answered Miss Spencer, unsuspiciously. "Change the growth of a limb, a branch or twig, to show what's beyond."

"Valery says that Nature is never out of drawing." Gartha emphasized the noun. Miss Spencer reddened suddenly, and clicked her teeth together.

"To be caught by an odious child like that," she murmured to the Baroness. Then again quickly changed her topic.

"I purn ret," remarked the Baroness humbly. "Not?" with a look around at the company generally.

"Yes, that's the trouble," remarked Miss Spencer.

"And you peel, Baroness," asked Gartha.

"But a little color makes you, if that were possible, only the more attractive, Baroness," Valery hastened to say, with a cross shake of the head at Gartha.

"And you won't peel until to-morrow," laughed Miss Spencer.

"Do you never do anything but eat in this house?" asked Quentin of Madame.

"We do many things, as you have just heard," answered Madame, looking brightly up at her friend. "Some more cakes, Charles, and another pitcher of cream. Some jam, Mary Thorndyke?"

"It's very fattening," said Gartha.

This parenthetical remark had its effect. Miss Thorndyke withdrew a plump, outstretched hand, and reddened unpleasantly. Her girth was increasing daily in this land of plenty.

"Lord Eldon said that Mamasha fattened them for the marché—the market, I mean," said Gartha, looking straight at Miss Thorndyke.

"I don't see why Madame lets that child come to five o'clock and everything else with the grown ups," murmured the victim sotto voce to the Baroness. The Baroness gave her a fellow-feeling glance.

"Gartha," said Valery, "if you speak again, I will send you to do some more lessons. Mademoiselle, I thought you were teaching her manners."

Valery had difficulty in enunciating this sentence, as Gartha had clasped him round his neck so tightly that he was almost breathless.

"Eet ees imposb' to teach that chile anythin' so spoil ees she," said the Baroness.

"He said——" continued Gartha, unsilenced by threats.

"Who said?"

"You ought to know, Mamasha. Lord Eldon. He said——"

Madame glanced at Quentin, reddened, and looked down.

"That there was a new reading to 'This little pig went to market.' He used to play it with my fingers, so." Gartha took her father's large brown hand between her own little ones. "He said it went this way—

"'This little pig went to market,

"'And this little pig tagged along,

"'And this little pig got pearls and emeralds,

"'And this little pig got houses and estates,

"'And this little pig got all kicks and no halfpence;'—Valery, dear, what are you doing? Give me your other hand,—

"'And this little pig got a mauvais sujet of a husband,

"'And this little pig was sent home to her mother,

"'But still all the little society pigs went to market.' What is a mauvais sujet of a husband, Papachen? That is a word that has never been ex-ex-pliqué."

"You are too young to be talking about husbands, child! All the same, no one will ever give you kicks and no ha'pence, because I shall see to it that all the ha'pence will be yours; consequently there will be no kicks."

"Valery, how can you talk to the child so?"

"I shouldn't like to be kicked," said Gartha, "but you can't buy much for a half a penny. I should not think that even a franc would buy much."

"Eet vele not puy a husban'. I know that much," said the Baroness, with a swift look at her own faded gown, and a reminiscent glance at her dissipated fortune.

"They come dear, husbands!" said Valery, seeing in imagination the Baron sitting in front of Maxim's, drinking his accustomed glass of absinthe, and looking through his monocle after such of the feminine passers-by as glanced alluringly at him.

"Mademoiselle, why do you allow Gartha to talk so much?" asked Madame, as she put a lump of sugar into Quentin's cup.

"I could do something with that chile if I had control excluseeve," Mademoiselle sniffed resentfully as she glanced toward Alixe, who had at that moment entered the farther opening into the ruins. The priest followed her. She still wore her dress of the

morning, and upon her head was the white Russian hat. Her hair was carelessly loose about her ears, the silver combs holding it in place. If ever a human being appeared to be utterly oblivious of concern in her personal appearance, it was this tall young woman whom they called Alixe.

"I wish that I could make Alixe think a little more of her dress," whispered Madame in a loud aside. "There are her closets full of——"

Gartha arose and met Alixe half way and repeated all the words that she had taken time to hear.

"I will remember what Mamasha says," said Alixe; "she is perfectly right."

At this snub from her beloved Alixe Gartha subsided for a time.

"And clothes are so abnormally cheap and pretty now-a-days," said Miss Spencer in an undertone to the Baroness; "if one knows where to go, Paris is really a very economical place to shop in."

"I never haf find eet so," sighed the Baroness, smoothing down an old black silk skirt which had seen many a better day, and recalling a tailor bill which had come to the Baron the previous week.

"I wonder what Alixe does with all her old clothes," said Miss Thorndyke in an undertone to Miss Spencer.

"She has never has any 'old clothes,'" returned Miss Spencer, "because she never has any new ones. A thing can't be old before it has existed at all. Now Mamasha always wears good clothes. There is great moral support in good clothes."

Miss Thorndyke surveyed the subject of these remarks critically.

"Old as they are," she said, "they have a style of

their own, and she has a certain way of wearing them; I wish I had it. It's something that belongs to her. But she has splendid things, Ada Spencer. I have seen them; Madame showed them to me. Closet after closet full. Madame herself orders them, I believe."

"Alixe, do take off that ridiculous old hat," called Madame.

Alixe laughed and showed her teeth. She took the hat from her head.

"Mercy! Put it on again, do!" said Madame hastily, discovering suddenly the lovely disorder of the light chestnut hair and its picturesque effect.

"She wears it," whispered Miss Spencer to Quentin, "because some artist said that it looked like a halo. He painted her face for la Sainte Vierge."

"He stole it," said Gartha, who was always hearing what she should not, "and put it on that figure of Marie Monrouge that stood for the Sainte Vierge. Alixe said it was des, des—well, something. She doesn't paint her face," continued Gartha, looking steadily at Miss Spencer. "Valery says that you decorate. What do you decorate, the hotels or les apartements?" Gartha spoke, with the French pronunciation.

Some natural color was added to the imitation, if imitation there were, as Miss Spencer took up her parasol and moved lauguidly away. "Shall I show you the ruins, Mr. Quentin?" she asked. Quentin looked at Madame.

"Go with her," said his hostess, with a resigned sigh. "I must fill these yawning voids."

"You seem to keep a sort of sublimated pension," commented Quentin, smiling at the labor Madame made of what she delighted in.

"Yes, isn't it?" As Madame poured out more tea, she sighed as if life were not worth living.

"When they have all eaten and drank their fill, I will take you to see the men above the farmyard gate."

"Oh, ze dear tzin mans! ze dear fat mans! I know not vich I lofe ze better of zoze mans!" exclaimed the Baroness, enthusiastically.

VII.

QUENTIN passed along the gravelled interior of the Abbey church, keeping pace with Miss Spencer's high heeled walk and the rustle of her silk-lined muslin. He heard, while he did not listen to the words, "Twelfth century. The earliest records are of eleven hundred and fifty. The Abbey, instead of being, as at present, so practically remote from the Convent proper, was in those days connected with it by other buildings, at least so the Archbishop told us only last evening after you left the salon. There is a book about it. He played billiards with me for an hour or more. The dear Archbishop! He is so charming, so human, so secular, so tolerant of the frailties of humanity. I love a secular prelate, don't you, Mr. Quentin? This place itself was secular enough at one time. I suppose you have heard, when the fourteenth or fifteenth Abbess took the crosse abbatiale."

"Did she wear her croix abbatiale as Alixe—as——" Quentin stopped short in what he was saying. He stammered confusedly. "I should ask her pardon," said he. "But I have never known any other name by which to call her. It came out before I thought. I——"

"One would think you had been here a year," laughed Miss Spencer. "Never known her by any other name!" she quoted back at him.

"Madame has never told me. In fact, she never mentioned her. I know that her name is Alixe, and that Gartha is her niece; more than this——"

"Odious child!" interrupted Miss Spencer, with a backward glance at Gartha.

"I know that Valery is her brother-in-law, and Madame her aunt."

"Has she told you that?" laughed Miss Spencer, evidently much amused at something in her own thoughts. "As you see, she gives succor and comfort to a holy priest, who is no better than he should be. His Grace warned her about him. I wonder if he knows how madly in love Halle is with her——"

"A priest in love! I am not of his church, but I must confess that such a suggestion seems too sacrilegious; too——"

"He is but a man, after all," said Miss Spencer.

"Yes, but not as other men are. At least he should not be; he——"

"But if she leads him on. She is awfully rich; she can do as she likes. Everything is forgiven a rich woman. I have lived long enough to know that riches mean exemption from criticism. What immense independence there is in wealth, abnormal wealth. Every one runs after you, even the church condones your misdemeanors."

"I should not think the word misdemeanor applicable here," said Quentin.

"Look there!" returned his companion. Quentin raised his eyes again toward the two figures standing just within the doorway whither they had withdrawn. The words they said were not distinguishable. Had they been, Quentin would have heard the priest say:

"Can I trust you?" He saw, however, the anxious look in the deep, hollow eyes.

"Certainly," replied his companion. "Have you not always?" Quentin saw that Halle bent downward. He took within his hand the large crucifix of silver which depended from the string of beads encircling her slim waist. The cross was studded with amethysts and shone a glorious mass of color in the sunshine.

"Kiss the cross," said he.

"Oh, Robert!" said she. "Not here! Not now! Is not my word enough?"

Halle's eyes shone with a wild light of disappointment.

"Very well, then," said Alixe gravely. She moved a little outside of the ruin, thus screening herself from view. She took the cross in her hands, and, looking upward, pressed the shining metal to her lips. Halle smiled with satisfaction.

Alixe answered the smile with the words, "Not as a daughter of the church, Robert, but in memory of Virginia Danielli." Halle shuddered and ceased to smile. "That is no oath. It is not binding," he said.

"I need take no oath to be true to a friend. Have I ever broken a promise? Virginia, good Catholic that she is, when she left me did not ask me to take an oath that I would be faithful to her. Why should you?"

They moved again within the walls.

"Those churchly flirtations are charming to watch," remarked Miss Spencer to Quentin. "A sort of Abelard and Heloise affair. There is no danger on either side, and one may go almost to the verge of prudence and not——"

"I hate to hear you talk like that," said Quentin. Miss Spencer looked up with interest.

"You amaze me!" she said. "Is it because you dislike to feel that the innocent dew of youthful charm is being brushed from the virginal soil, or because you don't wish to acknowledge that a pure soul has been already smirched?"

"I hate to hear a woman talk as you do about another woman," said Quentin, with impatience.

"But if it is true! You can see for yourself. Did you see her kiss that cross just now? No? I can see them better from here. Alixe has no reason to kiss that cross. She is the most determined little Protestant you can find in France. She only did it for effect. Mamasha and the Archbishop are hammering away at her all the time. She is a stone that no continual dropping will ever wear away."

Miss Spencer subsided upon a moss covered rock which had fallen from the roof-tree in some dead century. She drew aside her pink silk and muslin.

Quentin could not resist complying with this inviting gesture. He felt that he was about to learn something of the Abbey, and he was not willing to lose the opportunity. Miss Spencer talked and talked, and as she talked she drew little curves and diamonds in the gravel with her parasol at the tip of her pointed shoe.

"Alixe is one of the richest women in France, I believe, or she was when Bruno married her——"

"Married her? Then she is married?"

"Oh, yes, indeed! First, there is this Abbey——"

"Then this is not the home of Madame Petrofsky——"

"Oh, yes, Alixe gives her a home here! Mamasha

will sponge on anybody. Then there is that splendid place in the Pyrenees, but seems to me I have heard that she had to sell that to pay Bruno's debts. Then there is the villa on the Riviera, Cannes or Mentone, or somewhere, I don't know. I've never been there. Then she had a charming hotel in the Champs Elysées, where Bruno used to give his orgies, and a seaside place somewhere or other, and money in all the banks in the world. She is a very wealthy woman, our Duchess!"

"Those things are always exaggerated," said Quentin, with a strange sinking of the heart. "And where, then, is the Duke?"

"The Duke? Mercy on me! Hasn't Mamasha enlightened you? I don't wonder. It was all her doing. Mamasha hawked those girls about to half the capitals of Europe. Alixe was only seventeen. The old Duke fell dead just as he had signed his name in the marriage register. Just think how lucky for Alixe! and how near a thing it was! He had made his will in her favour and all. Mamasha follows the English custom," continued Miss Spencer. "Perhaps, after all, it's proper, as all she has came from the Duke. You know in my country once a duchess, always a duchess, unless, indeed, there is a higher title which one may claim; that's a custom which——"

"Yes, I know," said Quentin. "I have just been staying with the——" and he mentioned the well known name of a titled lady who had been for a fortnight past his hostess; her husband, plain Mr. Blank.

"Do *you* stay there?" exclaimed Miss Spencer, breathless at the honor heaped upon this great un-

known whom she had simply thought one of Madame's doubtful discoveries. "Why, how did you get to know them? You Americans seem to go everywhere now-a-days. You——"

"Then she is a widow, that young creature," resumed Quentin, raising his eyes with renewed interest and ignoring Miss Spencer's personalities.

"She was, till Mamasha married her to Bruno, but it's all hers—Alixe, I mean. That spiteful old cat is only here on sufferance. How Alixe allows her to usurp all her prerogatives I can't see. How *I* should lord it over her!"

Quentin was so deeply interested in this new history that he forgot to be resentful at the strictures upon his friend Madame.

"I believe there was a castle in Italy, too. He was an Italian, the Duke. Bruno is a Spaniard. He was a dreadful old man, the Duke, a thousand years old, more or less, and with a hundred pasts. Mamasha knew how to manage." Miss Spencer glanced at her listener in an insinuating manner.

"Do you mean to imply that Madame gave the Duke as he went to the altar a surreptitious dose of poison warranted to kill just after the blessing?" laughed Quentin.

"Oh, no! No one ever accused Mamasha of that." There was an emphasis on the final word as if unknown depths of infamy might be revealed did Miss Spencer think it worth her while. "She intended to put up with her son-in-law until he was gathered to his long line of titled and disreputable fathers; in fact, she was ready to gather him to her own youthful bosom. I don't know but Mamasha would have been the Duchess to-day, if, when he came to see her, he

had not seen Alixe by accident. They were living in Paris then in a little hugger-mugger apartment—in a fashionable quarter enough, though; Mamasha would have gilt chairs if she ate meat only on Sundays. Alixe, as I told you, was barely seventeen. She is just twenty this month. She had no more idea what marriage meant than I have this minute." Miss Spencer looked down with a mature smile of embarrassment.

"This is a strange revelation to me," said Quentin slowly. "But then——"

"Do you mean to say, Mr. Quentin, that you came to visit Alixe knowing no more about——"

"I am Madame Petrofsky's guest," said Quentin, "and that should have prevented my listening to——"

"But it is no secret. I am saying no harm," exclaimed Miss Spencer hurriedly, wishing to disclaim to this good-looking stranger any wish to gossip about her hosts. "Mamasha probably thinks you know all about it. Her old friends were frightfully angry at Mamasha for marrying Alixe to Bruno. He was her cousin, you know. Alixe had lent him loads of money. He got into several scrapes and lawsuits of one kind or another, and Alixe paid his debts. They were enormous debts. Colossal! He wheedles Alixe now out of her money, outrageously! He used to be Mamasha's favorite nephew, but I imagine that since she has succeeded in marrying him to Alixe, and he has really more right to her property than formerly, she is sorry every day of her life. Alixe doesn't care a fig for money, and Bruno is always experimenting. He says they fascinate him—his experiments——"

"But I cannot understand when his wife has so much why he needs——"

"Yes, that's what every one says! I asked Mamasha that same question the other day, and she said that poor Bruno had never done anything but spend money, first his own fortune, then all that he could borrow from Alixe. That he felt that Alixe despised him, and that now he meant to set himself right in her eyes. If there is one creature whom Bruno adores on the face of this earth, it is Alixe; that is, next to himself. He wants to show her, Mamasha says, that he can add something to the general fund. She smiles and lets him have his way, but even a fortune like the Duca di Brazzia's will not stand such a strain as that; besides, how absurd to spend a hundred thousand francs to make twenty thousand; but Bruno thinks that it rehabilitates him in Alixe's eyes." Miss Spencer's breath had failed.

"A strange way to increase one's fortune," said Quentin; "sending good money after bad."

"Well, Mamasha argues alternately on Bruno's side, and then on her own; never on the side of Alixe; that you will see as time goes on. She says that these investments of Bruno's will be permanent, and that the inventions will bring him in, for every fifty thousand that he now spends, certainly a hundred and fifty. He tells her that, of course, and she believes it, or pretends to. How does any one know that he isn't just spending the principal?"

"This is all very interesting," remarked Quentin. "I don't know that I ought——"

"Don't have scruples," said Miss Spencer. "I hate a man with scruples. Mamasha will tell you. She always confides in the last new man. She only hasn't had time yet."

"The last new man," repeated Quentin to himself

with anything but a satisfied feeling. Was that what he was? The last new man? He was getting new side-lights on Madame's character, but he told himself as these thoughts passed through his mind that he must consider their source, and, though Miss Spencer might intend to be truthful, there was, he felt certain, a modicum of spite mixed with her frankness of speech.

Quentin arose. Miss Spencer, having captured the most distinguished looking man who had been seen at the Abbey for many a day, arose also, but slowly. She would have to relinquish him soon enough. Let her hold him while she might.

"Although Alixe is a Protestant, she is educated to death, and, strange to say, was educated in a convent. I believe that she used to help Bruno with his chemicals, but he doesn't allow her to any more. He says he has got beyond her—that——"

"Help Bruno? You mean——"

"Yes, St. Aubin, with his experiments. Thank heaven, he is away at present. Every one flees when they hear the wheels of his chariot approaching. If he were here, I should be sorry for you, as I believe you sleep in the chalet. That is where all the——"

"Ada! Ada Spencer! Come here!"

"Isn't it dangerous for her to—help him with——"

"Come, Ada! Come! Don't you hear? We want to see the statues before the sun goes down."

"Mamasha has claimed you for her own," said Miss Spencer, walking slowly before Quentin in the direction of Madame. "Dangerous? To be sure, it is very dangerous. They had one explosion——"

"What a wonderful thing that is," said Quentin,

musingly, apparently forgetful of her company, "that cross of amethysts?"

"La Crosse Abbatiale," said Miss Spencer, with that extreme French accent which no Frenchman born could understand. "The one Alixe carries? She is the Abbess of Bref, you know."

They were approaching Madame, who strained her ears to catch Miss Spencer's lightest word, as an indication what the trend of the conversation had been. "Alixe has no crosier, Ada," called Madame. "La Croix Abbatiale if you will—Virginia Danielli's splendid gift; but what a fuss you make over Alixe's——"

Gartha interrupted, running to Quentin, taking his hand in hers and jumping up and down.

"Come, Mr. Quentin. Don't you hear Mamasha calling you? She is very much gênée with you. She says Ada Spencer never knows when to let a man——"

"Mr. Quentin has been at liberty for at least twenty minutes," said Miss Spencer, coloring hotly as he approached Madame. "Mamasha," she said aloud, "you should either refrain from comment upon your guests, or you should send Gartha to the nursery."

"Oh, come, come, Ada!" said Madame in a coaxing tone to the plain-spoken young woman. "Gartha makes all the trouble in this house. I have scarcely seen Mr. Quentin, and he is my guest, you know."

At Madame's summons they followed the variegated stream of humanity out under the ragged archway and up through the tunnel of green. Quentin, with no volition on his part, found Madame leaning upon him, her hand pushed through the bend of his arm, while Miss Spencer walked on before with Made-

moiselle. Gartha had not relinquished Quentin's hand.

"Et votre père, où est-il, Garta?" inquired Mademoiselle.

"She has her eye on Valery," whispered Madame to Quentin. "I suppose we must get rid of her soon, as we have had to of the others."

"He not, is not going to come," said Gartha, in purposely garbled English.

"Garta! Garta!" screamed Mademoiselle in English. "How often have I told you that you must not translate literally from the French into the English. That double negative is only used——"

"I must," said Gartha, decidedly, still speaking English. "I must translate to the foot of the letter."

"Did you ever see so tirzome a chilt?" asked Mademoiselle, turning back toward Quentin.

"She says that we spoil her," commented Madame in an undertone, "and so we do, I suppose, but she herself encourages it. I believe that she really loves that child, badly as Gartha treats her, and she is well aware that the Abbey is not a bad resting place for the summer."

"Nor for a lifetime," said Quentin, looking down upon her, and throwing a fervour into his tone, why he knew not, which brought to Madame's cheek a deeper flush.

The procession had now reached the lower of the stone steps. Quentin saw rising ahead of him a stream of pretty pale colors. He heard the hum of sweet voices. The place was alive with everydayness and matter-of-fact-ness, with a little of the world and its fashion thrown in. As they issued from the ruin, they had left behind them the mystery of the

place. Quentin was absorbed and fascinated with the variety of it all.

They crossed the terrace, this mass of bright plumage. Eugene unlocked the grille, and then threw open the door in the wall. Gartha was again jumping up and down and pulling at Quentin's hand like a young colt at the halter. Mademoiselle and Miss Spencer had dropped behind, and now Mademoiselle came running after them, breathlessly exclaiming in voluble French:

"Garta! Garta! You cannot go! You will spoil your shoes!"

"Come! Come!" said Gartha, urging Quentin. "Let us run!"

"You cannot go, Garta!" repeated Mademoiselle in a very decided tone.

"The French is a language which I do not comprehend—me!" said Gartha.

"It is her mother tongue," said Madame, turning laughingly to Quentin. "She is not at all at home in English."

"Just this once, Mademoiselle." It was the voice of Alixe. She came forward from somewhere behind them all.

"She will spoil her shoes," urged Mademoiselle.

"As if I had not more of the shoes! Nom de Dieu!"

"Come! Come!" to Quentin, with renewed pulling of the hand. Alixe had now come up to them and was standing just without the gate with the young priest.

"I think that you have not met Father Halle, Mr. Quentin," said she. "This is our very old friend, Father Halle, and he is also a trusted friend of my husband."

The men bowed, but neither offered his hand. The introduction seemed longer than necessary and stilted, Quentin thought, but he felt that he dimly understood the cause.

They had all emerged from the gate, Gartha still pulling Quentin onward, which caused him to hasten his footsteps, Madame keeping up her quick little Louis Quinze patter beside him.

"Gartha," said Alixe, "walk quietly. If you do not, I shall send you back.

"Yes, Alixe," replied the child submissively, and at once suited her pace to that of Madame.

"You see that Alixe can do anything with her," said Madame to Quentin.

The procession skirted the wall of the domain, as far as it environed the château.

"This was the old wall of the convent," began Miss Spencer, who had taken up her position again in front of Quentin. She turned toward him as she spoke.

"I am quite capable of explaining the château to Mr. Quentin, Ada," said Madame.

"She does take possession of a man!" confided Miss Spencer to Mademoiselle.

"You can see how carefully the old windows are guarded," said Madame, looking up at her guest. "Nothing but slits and loopholes most of them, with iron bars across even these. Just think how it has lasted, more than six hundred years, and looks as if it would last six hundred more."

"We don't build in that way now-a-days," he answered.

The advance guard had now halted, and as Madame and Quentin approached them the Baroness was apostrophising some one or something.

"Oh! You dear, fat mans! Oh! You dear, tzin mans! I know not vich I lofe ze best of zoze mans."

Quentin raised his eyes and caught sight of two carved figures of stone high above his head in a niche in the wall.

"If any testimony were needed as to the age of these buildings, there it is," said Father Halle.

The thin man showed his bones in the most approved anatomical manner. His look was sad and wretched; his lean and wasted jaws bagging downward; his skeleton hand was outheld for alms. The fat man by his side was round and jolly. His cheeks appeared to be bursting with laughter and good nature. His paunch seemed rotund with the weight of many a grand dinner. The stone was so ancient that time had worn many a hole and dent in its surface, but still the thin man looked gloomily downward, and still the fat man seemed to crack his cheeks with ludicrous jollity.

Quentin saw not much to admire in the two figures beside their age and the endurance with which they had weathered the storm and sunshine for over six hundred years. He "Oh'd" and "Ah'd" politely, however, and then turned away to follow the gorgeous bevy who were retracing their way toward the entrance gate. The voluble Baroness departed, throwing kisses over her shoulder to her dear fat mans, and her dear tzin mans, and declaring animatedly that she knew not which she lofed ze best of zoze dear mans.

VIII.

As the assemblage neared the door in the wall, dust seemed to fill the air. It flew thick, and Madame sneezed with several wild little screeches, which she endeavored in vain to smother. Alixe hurried past them, coughing as she ran.

"How strange!" said Madame when she could speak. "No carriage has passed by. Nor am I expecting any one."

"There goes a wagon," said Quentin; "back along the road."

"Some one must have arrived then!" Madame released Quentin's arm and accelerated her speed.

On entering the doorway it was evident indeed that some one had arrived. The terrace was piled high with luggage. Orders more or less authoritative were being given in a man's voice. The low tones of Alixe, which possessed such carrying power, and, when she chose to dictate, which no one refused to obey, were heard above the first voice, and Quentin saw that along toward the chalet some of the men-servants were struggling with a box which seemed too heavy for them. Mentally he compared this smaller box, of such apparent weight, with his own easily-lifted good-sized one.

"Ah, mon Dieu! It is Bruno," shrilled Madame.

"It is my friend, Bruno," said Father Halle, with

a sound in his voice which was a mixture of pleasure and fear.

"It is Bruno!" piped the merry note of the Rastaquouère. "Don't blow us up, Bruno, I beg of you."

"It is the husband of Alixe," whispered Miss Spencer in Quentin's ear. "I, for one, have business in town."

"Ah, bah! It is my Uncle Bruno," said Gartha. "That godenot, my Uncle Bruno."

"It is the Count St. Aubin," said Mademoiselle in a low tone. "Now you will see how quickly we shall lose our guests."

"It is the Monsieur le Comte," mumbled Charles. "Now there will be no more peace!"

Upon the terrace there was an air of excitement which centered about a crooked, thin, undersized man, whose skin was yellow, and whose eyes were small and black.

"Faites attention!" he called in a penetrating head voice. "If you let that box fall, my life's work is ended."

"We will not drop it, Monsieur le Comte," called Antoine and Pierre Monrouge in many jerky breaths as they staggered and shuffled and stumbled and perspired. They carried their burden as if, should they allow it to slip from their grasp, their life's work would also be ended.

"I thought you were at Hamburg," said Alixe.

"So I was. Fools! Dolts! Idiots! That I must see after such a set of ignoramuses, who will spoil the work of a lifetime. Careful there, Pierre Monrouge, if you know what is good for you. You will ruin me between you."

"They are doing their best, Bruno; the box seems heavy. And are you just from England?"

"Yes," answered St. Aubin, shortly.

"Ce cher Bruno!" said the Baroness to Miss Spencer, "with he's so pretty manners. Now you will see ze leafings like ze leafings of ze autumn."

"Now the men will give warning," whispered Madame to Alixe. "Why must he return so abruptly and harry the servants so that they——"

"Nonsense, Mamasha!" said Alixe, good naturedly. "What are they afraid of?"

"You know what Charles said the last time, when his hand was injured. He is such an excellent servant, too! Where could we find another who would do all that Charles does in this household?"

"That is very true, Mamasha," replied Alixe; "but think what it means to Bruno."

"Why should he keep on with his expensive researches? I never dreamed of this when—if I had imagined—I shall never forgive you, Alixe, for giving him so much control of your fortune. It is ridiculous. You might much better have given it to me. You know it cannot last forever. After the place at Pau was sold, and the house at Trouville—you are a rich woman no longer——"

"Oh, Mamasha, what difference does it make? We have still enough, and Bruno's pride will be satisfied with the fortune which he thinks he can make and thus become independent of me. I cannot blame him. Why cannot we let people be happy in their own way? It is such a dreadful thing to be dependent——"

"No one knows that better than I, Alixe." This Madame said in a tone which was full of bitterness.

Alixe turned. "Oh! Oh! Have I made you feel it? How, mother? How?"

"Hush!" said Madame in warning, looking nervously to where Quentin stood not far away.

"How have I made you feel it?" pressed Alixe in a lower tone. "I am sure it is right that you should have it all. It was your idea—no——" seeing the expression of Madame's face, "I am not bitter, mother. I only think sometimes of what my life might have been. I was so young and——"

"He should not be coming here in this way!" exclaimed Madame, reverting to her grievance. "Now, every one will leave."

"I have no control over Bruno, that you know, Moth—Mamasha. He has always been your favorite; you should speak to him, he will——"

"I speak to him! I have lost my power over him, Alixe, since he married you. Certainly I did not foresee. Now, every one will be going——"

"I for one shall not be sorry," said Alixe, half smiling.

"Fond as I am of Bruno, he should not be allowed to burst in upon us in this unexpected way."

"We cannot tell him not to come. He has the right. It was not my fault, mother."

"Hush!" said Madame again. "Do not reproach me, Alixe; it is more than I can bear."

"I shall not reproach you," said Alixe. "It was a dreadful mistake. I was too young to see—to know——"

"Alixe! Alixe!" sounded along the terrace in the Count's voice. "I want you."

"Yes, yes, Bruno," answered Alixe, walking swiftly toward the chalet. The priest followed her with quick

steps. Madame turned to the Baroness. "I do not think Father Halle good for Bruno," she said. She spoke of the priest as if he were a bit of unripe fruit or an over-rich pastry.

Alixe reached the chalet steps and was about to enter the archway, but was stopped by a cry from overhead.

"Don't come up, Alixe." She came out from under the overhanging vines, disappointment in her face. "No, you mustn't come up," called St. Aubin from over the narrow little balcony, "the things are too dangerous. If I blow myself up, it will not matter so much."

"Oh, Bruno!" said Alixe, kindly. "It would matter very much. I should like to come up. You must have some new chemicals which I have not seen. I should like to know how you manage them. I found it all so interesting."

"No, no!" said the Count, decidedly. "I called you only to tell you that I have already made something by my last invention."

"Oh, Bruno!" exclaimed Alixe gayly. "How happy you must feel!"

"I heard the news only this morning. Yes, I am glad, because I want you to see that I am good for something besides wasting your money."

"What was it, Bruno? An automobile?"

"N-n-no, not exactly that."

"Have they bought your patent, Bruno?" asked Alixe, shading her eyes and looking up at him from under the brim of her old Russian hat.

"No, I cannot tell you about it now. But I am much encouraged; I have made fifty thousand francs already. Just think of that, Alixe! Fifty thousand

francs! You see, I am more like other men than you think."

"I have always thought you very clever, Bruno," said Alixe. "Two thousand pounds! Only think of that! I am glad for your sake, though, when I have more than enough, it seems so useless——"

"Don't say 'have,' Alixe," said St. Aubin leaning over and looking down upon her. "You must say 'had' after this."

He spoke in a low tone, so that those a little further away could not hear: "You know that I have sunk fortunes in the perfecting of my plans. I do not believe that any one else ever thought of just this way to apply the hidden power that I have discovered. I am now turning my attention to the automobile. Don't you remember how I tried everything that science could achieve? That is, so far as I knew anything about it. Alchemy was one thing, do you remember? We thought we had a gold mine up here in the chalet."

"Yes, Bruno," laughed Alixe; "that was before we were married."

"Were we ever married?" said St. Aubin, with a return of the bitter tone which had sounded through his first words. He turned quickly: "Who is that? Don't come in so like a cat?" Something was said in a low tone, by the person within the room, which Alixe did not hear.

"Good-by, Bruno," said Alixe, looking kindly upward. "I will see you at dinner."

Halle came from the back of the room to the long windows, and looked out through the vine-clad opening. He was very much taller than St. Aubin, and his pale face made the Count's appear even more sal-

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low than usual. "How can you have her here!" he exclaimed, angrily. "If you must make experim——"

"Ta, ta!" replied the Count, impatiently. "Don't interfere, Bob. Very well, run along then, Alixe. Halle is afraid we shall blow ourselves up and you into the bargain."

"Till dinner, then," said Alixe.

Alixe walked slowly away toward the château. She met Quentin, who was just turning in at the archway of the chalet stairs.

Alixe stopped a moment.

"Mr. Quentin," she said, "I think that when our other guests are gone, we had better give you a different room—one over in the château——"

"I like my room," said Quentin. "I don't see why——"

"I should rather," said Alixe. "Count St. Aubin is very fond of making experiments, and I am always fearing some accident."

"And what about the Count himself?" asked Quentin.

"That goes without saying," answered Alixe coldly. "But I have given up expostulating with him long ago. He used to have very simple chemicals, and I used to delight in helping him, but he has grown learned of late, and he says that he has left me behind. I have discovered that there are some things which a woman cannot compass, Mr Quentin."

There was the sound of flying feet from the direction of the château.

"Alixe! Alixe!" called Gartha, when yet some distance along the terrace. "Mamasha wishes you to

know that the dinner will be in the château to-night, in honor of the Lord Eldon."

"Lord Eldon!" exclaimed Alixe.

"Yes, the Lord Eldon, and Uncle Bruno, and Monsieur le Maurier. They have both sent the messages, and Mamasha says that this time she hopes you dress yourself de rigueur."

"I will remember, Gartha," said Alixe, smiling her answer. She bowed to Quentin and proceeded along the terrace.

"Mr. le Maurier is coming," screamed Miss Spencer to Quentin as she met him on the terrace. "He's the man that edits a blue book, or a purple book, or something esthetic, or supposed to be. He gets it up in the most anæsthetic manner. I always go to sleep when it comes in the house."

"Uncle Bruno! Uncle Bruno!" called Gartha impatiently from under the chalet balcony.

"What is it, Gartha?" The low head was pushed out just over the balcony rail.

"Mamasha wants you to know that you are to be en frac, de rigueur, this evening, of the best manner possible. The Lord Eldon is coming; he has telegraphed, and Monsieur le Maurier."

"I don't see why I should dress for Lord Eldon at Madame's orders," said Bruno impatiently. "I am quite tired out, and as for that little editor—however, tell Mamasha I will obey, and tell Alixe, Gartha, Gartha! do you hear me? Tell Alixe that I wish her to make herself handsome."

"She does not have to make herself handsome, Uncle Bruno. Mamasha said that I am to tell you to try not to have an esplosion before dinner, because they will leave to-night, and we have not enough of

fiacres to get them to their trains. Mon Dieu, non! Miss Spencer, and Miss Thorndyke, and Lady Barnes are all especting petits bleus that they are wanted in Paris at once. The Baroness will not have none, because she has no hôtel of her own, and Mademoiselle will have to stay until Mamasha shall pay her bill for me."

"At her same old tricks." St. Aubin laughed unpleasantly.

"But," continued Gartha, "she has asked Mamasha to change ses appartements, move her to the other side of the château. They are all packing their chiffons and lots of them are going in the first train which comes in the morning."

"No matter how dark a day it is, there is always something to be thankful for," said the Count laughing again."

"And they are begging of Mamasha, all but begging of her, to have all their dinners—les repas, you know—in the château, until they do leave. They all pretend it is the business, or the sickness, or some engagement, but we know the reason, do we not, Uncle Bruno? Te souviens-tu, mon cher oncle, when you have burned my cat and have frappé a hole in the chalet wall?"

"That is another thing to thank Providence for, Gartha, burning the cat!" returned St. Aubin piously. "Always remember that! So the dear old maids are going! So much the better. Who is in the other wing, Gartha?"

"An American *monsieur*, a Mr. Quentin. Mademoiselle says he is très gentil. Ada Spencer, she says, has set her cap with him already. What is it to set a cap, Uncle Bruno?"

"One of Mamasha's latest?" asked St. Aubin, not answering the child's question.

"The very latest," said Gartha. "Mamasha goes to adore that Mr. Quentin. One can see that with a blow of the eye. She regards him, that Mr. Quentin, with a manière adorable. I think she would have place him in the other wing if she had known you were coming, Uncle Bruno."

At this doubtful compliment, St. Aubin gave vent to the exclamation, "Damned uncomfortable!" He turned to the priest. "What shall we do now, you lantern-jawed son of holy church?"

"My advice would be to do nothing. To give it up," replied Halle.

"Just when we have got so far? Not I. You haven't the spunk of a mouse, Bob. Do you know that I have just made fifty thousand francs, and when it is paid I shall hand five thousand of it over to you."

A look of cupidity came into the priest's eyes. His face grew paler. "Five thousand francs!" he exclaimed. "Five thousand francs! It seems worth all the risk, doesn't it, Bruno? With such results, and yet—" He shook his head and put his hand over his eyes. "Have you seen the morning papers, Bruno?"

"Pschutt! Don't be more of a woman than you can help! What are you afraid of?"

"I *am* afraid," said Halle. "I *am* afraid, and that is the truth."

"Don't begin to esplode until Valery is out of the way, will you, Uncle Bruno?" It was the young voice of Gartha underneath the chalet window.

"Go away, Gartha! and do stop this talk of blow-

ing up. I have had very few accidents, that you know well."

"I am not going away, Uncle Bruno. I am coming up, I wish to see those tuff-tuffs which you make —tuff-tuffs," she repeated, looking proudly around her to see who might be listening. "That is the argot of the quartier, tuff-tuffs."

"You are not coming up. Go to the château and tell Mamasha that I shall obey her orders, and dress this evening"—he turned to the priest—"as becomes my manly figure, eh, Bob?" Suddenly his face grew pallid underneath its tint of yellow. He raised his claw-like hands, and shook them in the air. "How I hate the whole human race," he said, between a shriek and a howl. "How I hate the Lord in heaven."

"Stop, stop, Bruno!" said Halle with a frightened look. "You must not say such words."

"Look at me!" said St. Aubin, turning his bent figure toward the priest. "Look at me! I am a fine, shapely creature, am I not? A fine figure of a husband, made, as we are taught, after the image of God Almighty. That peerless young creature! She is fit to be an empress. Compare us. See how in her pity and good nature—and she loathes me, Halle, I can see it at every glance of her eye—see how she defrauds herself of her splendid height that she may try to come down to my level. My level! My physical level! She could never in God's world come down to my moral level——"

The priest was very pale. "She could never do that," he said. "No, nor to the level of any man."

"When my aunt married her to me, Bob, Alixe seemed to imagine that as we had been good friends

as cousins, we should continue that friendship as husband and wife. Imagine it, Halle! Two such marriages! Is there any remote nook in the extreme confines of hell, white-hot enough for our dear little Mamasha? She escaped the Duke, but she has not escaped me."

"Bruno, Bruno! Do not!" said Halle. He leaned out of the window and drew in long breaths of air.

"When I see her as I saw her to-day—but come, Bob, I must open my boxes and get out something that will become me, as the husband of the Duchess. The beautiful young Duchess, and her gnome of a husband! We should act a play for our guests to-night; it should be called 'Beauty and the Beast.' Here, Bob, take these keys and open the small box." Halle caught the jangling ring thrown at him, knelt, and applied a small key to the lock of one of the boxes. He threw the lid upward. St. Aubin turned.

"No, no, not that one!" Halle looked up at the fierce tone. St. Aubin's face was convulsed with passion. "May I never forget the cause of my prosperity? Not for one moment? Must you always be reminding me of it? Fool!"

Halle winced as if he had been struck as he closed the lid and hid from view the mass of machinery, wheels, springs, cogs and levers.

"Lock it!" commanded Bruno, "and open the pale yellow box. That matches my complexion of cream and roses? That belongs to a gentleman, the husband of a Duchess; the box which you have just closed, to a devil from hell."

IX.

When Quentin entered the great salon at eight o'clock, he found it full of people, among them several persons whom he had not seen before. Lady Barnes was there, and "the Jennings girls," Miss Thorndyke, and Miss Spencer, and a florid little gentleman who was introduced as Lord Eldon. Every one was laughing at the little man's jokes, Valery loudest of all. The Rastaquouère was a resplendent vision, and though dressed in customary suit of solemn black, his inevitable gorgeousness made the other men appear more or less as if they had not dressed at all. He had gone to the extreme, as ever, in decoration. The Count was there, and Father Halle; and who was that tall vision of loveliness standing near the flower-filled chimney place, talking with an old gentleman who bore a striking resemblance to Napoleon Third? The old Russian hat in which he had seen her was gone. The beautiful hair was arranged in a coronet, a diamond tiara crowning the whole. The lovely shoulders were bare, as were the fair arms and hands. The gown of grey lisse sprinkled with cut steel, the necklace of diamonds and pearls surrounding the statuesque throat, the collar clasped at the back, the strings of pearls falling in rows upon her neck, enhanced her beauty and made a picture which Quentin never forgot.

"She seems to carry all the family property on her person," said Miss Spencer's ubiquitous voice. "You know what Harry Ware said, I suppose, that when the Duke died, she laid down her cross and took up her crown."

Quentin stood gazing spellbound at this wonderful picture, hardly hearing Miss Spencer's words.

"She has forgotten to stoop," said Miss Spencer.

"A young goddess!" he breathed. He heard as if in a dream Madame's voice saying to Lord Eldon, "Have you seen the Paris journals?" and Lord Eldon's answer, "I saw them on the train." He heard Valery say, "Mamasha, what a spoil-sport you are. You know very well that the Daniellis were on board that steamer. Don't speak so loud, Alixe may hear you." He heard another voice saying, "How our dear Mamasha loves a sensation." Quentin turned and saw a little yellow creature who was looking upward at Madame, though she was a small woman.

"We are speaking of a terrible accident at sea," said Madame explanatorily in a lowered tone of voice. "Have you met the Count, Mr. Quentin? Bruno, this is my friend, Mr. Quentin. The Danielli girls have just been staying here, and Virginia was perhaps the dearest friend that Alixe had, in fact——"

"I forbid you to tell the Duchess until to-morrow," said St. Aubin sharply. He had bowed slightly to Quentin, showing plainly by his speech and manner that he resented the familiar use of his wife's name to an utter stranger. Quentin understood his intention, and turned away somewhat annoyed, feeling that it was not his fault if Madame was at times a trifle underbred.

"Of course it was a French steamer," said Lord Eldon.

"There you go with your British prejudices. Mr. Quentin, Lord Eldon," said Madame parenthetically. "No, unfortunately a German one, though why I say unfortunately I do not know. It is all unfortunate. Why! Bruno," turning to him, "that is the very steamer you crossed in to Southampton, isn't it?"

Quentin glanced at the Count and saw he was trembling slightly; the thought flashed through his mind that perhaps there was some one on board for whom the Count cared. Perhaps one of those girls who had been staying at the Abbey; and he now remembered that Miss Spencer had suggested, among the other bits of information which she had gratuitously given him, that he (St. Aubin) had been more interested in her than propriety demanded. A feeling of resentment arose within his breast that the husband of that peerless woman could even think of any one else.

"And the Daniellis were on board, weren't they?" inquired Miss Thorndyke, who had joined the group.

"Yes, they were on board," answered St. Aubin, from stiff lips.

"Faith! you'll never get a safe steamer till you get an Irish one," said Valery. "The green flag at the masthead."

Lord Eldon laughed tolerantly.

"Madame is served," said Charles from the open doors at the side of the salon.

Charles stood near Madame, but he looked at his younger, legitimate mistress. Lord Eldon turned and surveyed the room. Madame bent toward him expectantly, but Lord Eldon, an old bird in diplo-

macy and the usages of precedence, would rather break a friendship than make a mistake in the rules which no one knew better than he. He advanced toward Alixe and offered his arm, at the same moment that St. Aubin took Madame's hand, and thrust it within his own. Madame bit her lip as she heard St. Aubin say:

"They may do it when I am away, but not when I am here. Come, Mamasha dear! Sit on my wife's left, Mr. Quentin, if you please, and take the Baroness; Lady Barnes, on Lord Eldon's right, I think, with Valery; the cards are all there, I suppose, but the table seems longer than usual somehow. Monsieur le Maurier, take Miss Jennings, on Madame's left, if you please. Bob, pick up Miss Spencer," and thus did Bruno, Count St. Aubin, marshal his forces, much to Madame's chagrin and discomfiture. Bruno and Monsieur le Maurier were but a poor exchange for Lord Eldon and Quentin, her own particular friends, but there was nothing to be done, and Madame knew when to submit. Her smile was as that of an angel as she took her place. Quentin, bewildered and astonished, found himself on the left of the young chatelaine. He gazed curiously at her for a moment as her nearer radiance enveloped him. Decidedly, Alixe, in the old Russian hat, and the concealing laces, and Alixe wearing a queen's ransom upon her throat, her neck, her arms, a crown upon her lovely head, seemed two entirely different creatures, although Quentin found that there appeared to be no change in her own point of view or manner, because of these adornments.

The conversation between Lord Eldon and Valery turned upon speculations and the value of modern

investment, and the Rastaquouère sang the glories of the Rand and the result if a Briton, meaning an Irishman, could once get "a fair show." "I can't see why you don't come out there and invest, Bruno," called Valery down the long table.

St. Aubin thrust aside some flowers and vines to answer him.

"How much does your speculation out there bring you in, Valery?" he asked.

Valery, with ready and not too scrupulous imagination, mentioned a sum whose size took away the breaths of the listeners. St. Aubin looked up at the priest. "Perhaps that would have been safer, Bob," said he. The priest looked uneasy.

"I am not a business man," he replied, "and I know nothing absolutely of speculation, but if I were, I should certainly advise the Rand; certainly."

"But, you see Bruno doesn't know anything about the Rand, and he does about inventions," said Madame. "And then he is so kind-hearted! He could not bear to see those poor creatures work so hard out there. Now, in his inventive business, there is no need of his killing anybody but himself." Madame had no fancy for seeing more of the fortune, which she had with such difficulty succeeded in obtaining, melt away into thin air.

St. Aubin's fork dropped from his hand to his plate with anything but a well-bred clatter.

"Mamasha!" he said in a tone of annoyance, "how often have I told you that I cannot bear to be talked about!"

"Modesty, Bruno! Modesty!" said Valery.

"When does the first train leave in the morning?" asked Miss Spencer.

Madame caught the question.

"At nine o'clock, I think, Ada. But surely you do not think of going away to-morrow."

"I think I must return." Miss Spencer looked down at her plate, then up again. "And Mary Thorndyke is coming with me." This addition in answer to an appealing look from Miss Thorndyke, who had begged her that at dinner she would make their causes one. "You see my aunt is ailing."

"Mary Thorndyke's aunt isn't ailing."

"But grandma is quite feeble, Madame, and I really think I must go too."

"Will there be room in the wagonette for me and my secretary?" asked the elder Miss Jennings. "I find that I must go to the British Museum to examine some books. I want to study a little and finish my researches before I go to Sir Henry's on the twelfth."

"Going shooting?" inquired Valery from his seat down the table.

"Do you shot ven you are there?" inquired Mademoiselle.

"I carry a gun generally," answered Miss Jennings in a carelessly superior tone.

"And leave the secretary to do the writing, I suppose," said Valery. "Is that the way books are made?" and then, waiting for no answer, "Who are you going gunning for? Ought to be Bruno. See now, Bruno"—stretching his neck an inch from its covering, like a turtle overburdened with fat—"how you are frightening Miss Muffett away by the wholesale."

"I cannot see what I have to do with the exodus,"

said St. Aubin, carefully dissecting an artichoke. "What a wretched apology for a vegetable this is!"

"Why, Bruno, dear!" replied Madame in a plaintive tone. "I had Jeannot cook them especially for you. You are always asking for them."

"A very poor way to eat a very good sauce," remarked Valery. "Hand me the artichokes, Charles."

Meanwhile the dinner passed at Quentin's end of the table, to him, as if it were a dream. He said but little, listening while Alixe, as he called her in his thoughts, discussed politics, English, French, and Russian, and the church, Protestant and Catholic, with Lord Eldon.

When Alixe, looking at Madame, arose simultaneously with her, and was escorted by Lord Eldon to the salon, and Quentin had deposited the Baroness there also, he returned to the dining-room, to find that the men servants had finished withdrawing the cloth. The wine was placed at one end of the table. Lord Eldon moved into Madame's vacant seat next the Count, and the others closed up the spaces, by placing themselves in the seats left empty.

The conversation, which was resumed by Lord Eldon, was of the loss of the Atlantic steamer.

"I read the account in the train as I was coming down here," said he. "I did not mention it to your wife, because you asked me not to, or else you asked Madame, I forget which; but don't you think it a very singular thing? The weather has been particularly good all this month. There has been no fog reported, and no other steamer reports a collision. They found, I believe, part of one of the boats, piece of the bow with the letters '—cean Mona—' That proves it without doubt to be the Ocean Monarch,

for whose arrival the owners have been looking for the last two weeks."

St. Aubin moistened his dry lips.

"Ice, probably," he said huskily.

"The brute!" said Quentin to himself. "To care for any other woman in the world."

He glanced at the priest, whose elbow was resting on the table, his eyes shaded by his hand. Suddenly Halle raised his head, poured out and drank off a petit verre, then another, in such rapid haste that he coughed and strangled as the clear liquid ran down his throat.

"You're a good son of the church, Father Bob," said Valery, laughing and patting Halle on the back. "See how accustomed they are to liquor. They never drink at all, you know, at least not in public;" this with a sly wink at Lord Eldon.

"The exception proves the rule," said Lord Eldon. "Verbum sat sapienti——"

"Let him alone, can't you, Valery? There's nothing worse than having liquor go the wrong way."

"Faith, I believe you, Bruno," said Valery. "And that's down somebody else's throat."

"If you will excuse me, Eldon," said St. Aubin, "I will withdraw; I have had a very fatiguing trip."

"Went to Southampton, didn't you?" asked Valery in an inquisitive tone. "The second time since the Daniellis left, isn't it?"

"No, only the first. Yes, yes. I went to Southampton. How you do keep harping on my going to Southampton. One would think no one ever went to Southampton before. As a matter of fact, thousands of people go to Southampton every year, and why my going should be considered at all pecu——"

Valery looked up at St. Aubin in astonishment.

"Highty-tighty, we are touchy! What's the matter with you, Bruno?"

"Bruno!" said Halle, in a tone which had an undercurrent of warning in it.

"I remained in England a fortnight after—after——"

"Mamasha said you were going to stay with Lord Eldon, that you told her so," said Valery.

"She must have misunderstood me," said St. Aubin, glancing in an embarrassed manner at Lord Eldon's surprised face. "I went to look at some chemical works. I think of investing in them, buying some stock—they are making great improvements in——"

"Sending good money after bad," said Valery.

"What is it, Charles?" said St. Aubin, to the servant who had been standing behind him for some moments and was at that moment first observed by him.

"A person to see you, Monsieur le Comte," said Charles in a low tone.

"What! Who can it be at this hour? My God, Bruno!" The priest arose in apparent agitation; every trace of color had left his face.

"Hush!" said St. Aubin, "I will go and see." He laid his arm round Halle's shoulder. "You had better come away yourself, perhaps. He is not well, Valery——"

"He said, sir," began Charles.

"What the devil is it to you what he said?" began St. Aubin. "You are forgetting your manners. I will come out to him."

Halle arose and joined St. Aubin and the two passed out of the door together.

"Queer!" said Valery, looking after them.

"Only a workman, monsieur," said Charles, who loved to appear to know all that went on at the château.

"A workman! I thought it was a message about those unfortunate people. I never saw Halle so upset. He can't be well. They have been after him with a pretty sharp stick up there in Paris."

"He looks worse than I have ever seen him," remarked Monsieur le Maurier, who was credited with being a secret partner in the firm of one of the most prominent of Parisian journals. He then began to tell all that he knew of the loss of the Ocean Monarch. He piled horror on horror, until Quentin turned away, sick at heart. As he arose, he heard Valery say to Lord Eldon:

"Can there really be anything in the story that Ada Spencer is telling, of Bruno's infatuation for Virginia Danielli?" Lord Eldon's answer he did not catch, for he had crossed the room and was in the grand salon.

X.

When St. Aubin and the priest emerged upon the terrace, they walked toward the chalet.

"Where is the man, Pierre Monrouge?" called the Count.

"I am here, Monsieur," said a voice from out the shadow. A form arose and came out from under the recess formed by the chalet pillars. The man wore the blouse of a workman.

"Oh, it is you, Guérin," said Halle. He drew a long breath, which was half a sigh of relief. "I thought it might be——"

"Never mind what you thought," said St. Aubin. "You are losing your mind, Bob. You talk too much. You must control yourself better. If you do not think of yourself, think of me— Well," turning to the workman, "what have you to say to the Count?"

"I have something for the Count," said the man in a clear tone of voice, whose owner was plainly conscious of nothing that he wished to conceal.

"Don't roar so, my good man. There! There! Give it to me."

"The Father promised me that I should see the Count this time," said the stranger, looking at Halle.

"The Count is engaged with guests," said St.

Aubin. "Why did not you send for the Father here, instead of sending into the table for the Count?"

"He said that he would see me when I came again," said the man doggedly. "You said so, Father. I want to ask him about a little patch of ground——"

"I will carry your message to him," said St. Aubin, "and send the Father back with the answer."

"It is always the same," said the man turning impatiently away; "they always say that he is away or engaged. It is a small patch of ground which adjoins a bit of my wife's——"

"If you will write it down and send it here to the Count, I will see that he gets it and that he sends an answer," said St. Aubin.

"And my payment for the little springs——"

"I will pay for them," said St. Aubin at once. "Run to my room, Bob. You will find some loose change in my pockets, and some notes in the secrétaire."

"The work is very incomplete," said the man as Halle walked away. "I cannot see how it can be of use to the Count as it is, because——"

"Yes, yes, I know it is incomplete, my good man, but you have not seen the door on which the Count wishes to use it. You know he is quite an inventor, our Count, and you will not have to use it. It will be properly arranged by the Count himself."

"If the monsieur allow, I should like some food," said the man humbly. "I have walked a long distance to arrive at this time, as I was ordered."

"It is true," said St. Aubin. "But the Count told the Father, I thought, to meet you this evening, in

Paris—he could not get away. Mamasha is, as Valery says, a spoil-sport." He said these last words to Halle, whose footsteps sounded near.

"Why didn't you take the train and go to Paris as I told you?" said Halle. "I have been waiting for your petit bleu."

"It costs money to go to Paris, Father, and I did not know if the Count would be willing to pay for——"

"Not so loud, my man. It was distinctly understood, Guérin, that you were to take the train and go to Paris and that I was to meet you in the Rue Vaugirard. You were to telegraph me——"

"People are lost in the great city," said Guerin.

"Yes, that is exactly why I told you to—but what is the use of talking to— Which road did you take to come here?"

"The South road, Father, along by the great farm of Monsieur d'Alben, and so round by Pontarles. It is a long walk. It took me two hours and over."

"And the trip to Paris would have taken you but little more, and you would have seen Paris. Did any one know you were coming here?"

"No, Father."

"Your tongue will be the death of you, Bob, not to speak of some one much more important. Tell Eugene to get this man some food. He can eat it here and then be off."

"I could go to the kitchen, monsieur," suggested the man. "It does not become me to allow the monsieur to order a servant to wait on me; I, a poor ouvrier——"

"Don't moralize, my man. They are all busy in there. We have a great houseful to-night. Eat and

drink, and then start back upon your road. Who is that?"

"I am only enjoying the night, Monsieur le Comte."

"And this is Monsieur le Comte!" said the workman turning to St. Aubin in astonishment.

"No, no!" said Halle in a low tone. "This is another Count, the Count of—but what matter to you? Eat and drink, my good man, and be off. You have made your little springs very well, but see that you do not talk about them. When there is much talk of Revenants, and one buys a little spring to close a door against the spirits——"

"Good heavens, Halle! Will you never silence that tongue of yours? Give him his money and let him go." These words from St. Aubin were said in Italian. Halle put some money into the man's hand, at which the latter looked down in surprise.

"It was to be only ten francs, and the Father has given me a louis."

"Nom de Dieu, man! Have you no pity for my nerves, you with your eternal clack and cavilling? Is it not enough? Most men would be glad to get twice what they have earned. I pay you this because the Count has no place to offer you within the château."

"A very—remarkably—honest—man." It was le Maurier's voice. "Why should he be paid twice what he has earned, Count? That is where you rich people spoil the market for us poorer ones——"

"It is only because we cannot take him in tonight," said St. Aubin. "He can pay for his lodging at some auberge;" and then, in a low tone, "Send him off, Bob, my nerves are on edge."

St. Aubin went hurriedly toward the chalet and Halle waited to watch the man eat his food and drink

his wine, and to see him out of the enclosure; while le Maurier paced up and down, up and down, concerned apparently with the doubtful beauty of the night. The moon was bright and wonderful at one moment, clouds covering its face at the next. When the man had finished his meal, and Pierre Monrouge had let him out of the gate, Halle followed St. Aubin toward the chalet. Le Maurier stood near the grille as the workman walked away. One could hear his heavy shoes clumping as he moved off to the right, away from the direction of Moncousis. When Halle had disappeared, and Pierre Monrouge had cleared away the workman's plate and glass, Mr. le Maurier looked about him. The door into the salon was open, and within there was music, and sweet low talking, and laughter, and a glow of light, which made any movement on the terrace impossible to discern. He stepped close to the grille, unfastened it quietly, then opened the door, and closing it softly, he proceeded swiftly down the valley away from the direction of Moncousis, as had the mechanic.

Le Maurier was gone for an hour or more. When he gave the bell handle a gentle twitch, Pierre Monrouge came sleepily and opened it. Monsieur le Maurier's face had a satisfied expression as he entered and was informed that all the guests, as well as the family, had retired. He did not tell Pierre Monrouge not to mention his late walk, that would impress it upon his mind. He slipped in through the kitchen door. He crept softly to his bed in the new part of the château, and laid himself down with a smile upon his lips, and slept the sleep of "the just man made," in his own mind, almost "perfect."

XI.

That night, before Quentin slept, he experienced some strange sensations. He heard noises and mysterious whispers, and once or twice he thought that he heard near footfalls whose sound was carefully subdued, but on sitting up in his bed and lighting his short candle end, he found that he was quite alone. He went into the dressing room, and penetrated still further into the closet, but there he found no cause for these investigations. The wind, coming from he knew not where, extinguished his candle. He relighted it; again he was left in darkness. He then scratched a match and held the flame close to the candle, when by its light he saw that the wick was at an end, though there was still an inch or two of the wax left. He searched for another candle, but though he scratched matches without number, he could not discover one of the half dozen which he had noticed the evening before when he had dressed for dinner. Things began to look careless or serious, he knew not which. He threw his window wide. The open half flew back and struck against the vines of the balcony. The moon streamed palely in, but made the corners of the room only darker than before. He pulled to the door between the rooms, but now, with an acknowledged chill in his bones, so that after beginning to undress, he went over and bolted it. He

then returned to the window and looked across at the ruins. He fancied that he saw something moving outside the walls. He turned and glanced at the second story of the château. There was a bright light there, and he saw that a figure was pacing up and down, up and down. Sometimes the hands and arms were raised to heaven, showing grotesque and gigantic upon the white shade. Sometimes the head was bowed upon the breast in the attitude which betokens despair. Was this a ghostly visitant too? Was this the room where the Lady Abbess was said to walk? Suddenly Quentin felt a blast of cold air upon his back. He turned. The door which he had bolted was slowly opening. The room was dark and the room beyond that darker still. He heard again the whispering noise and then a long-drawn sigh; an unmistakable sigh. Quentin, who had ever been a sceptic of the truth of appearances supernatural, began to believe that, at last, he was to be convinced as to their reality. He went to his bed, and, with an effort, he succeeded in pushing the great old-fashioned piece of furniture across the room. He planted it against the door which he had again closed and then lay down. As he lay there, he heard something moving in the dressing room. There were rustlings against the further panels, but he was determinedly collecting his thoughts for slumber, when suddenly there came three raps upon his outer door.

Quentin sprang up, went to the door and opened it. The blackness of utter darkness greeted him, for the lantern was out.

He stood there for a moment, irresolute, peering down the black stairway.

"Well? Well?" he shouted. "What is it? Who is it?"

There was silence for a moment more, and then he heard the key turn in the lock of the opposite door, and some one call, "Who is there?" At the same time St. Aubin threw his door open.

He stood there, a small, yellow creature, in a suit of night clothes as yellow as himself. He held a lighted candle which shed a feeble glow upon his figure.

"It is I," said Quentin. "I heard a rap at my door and thought it was——"

"It is too bad for Mamasha to put you in those rooms, Mr. Quentin," said St. Aubin. "She always plays that trick upon strangers to convince herself, through them, I believe, of the truth. No friend is too sacred for Mamasha's sacrificial altar. The wind is never tempered to her shorn lambs. Has she told you nothing about those——"

"She asked me if I was nervous. I am not particularly nervous, but I should be glad to get some sleep. It must be quite late. I shouldn't mind if I could sleep through it."

"Ah! That's what I am afraid you cannot do," said St. Aubin. "If you will come to my rooms I will give you my bed. I often sleep in a chair. Father Halle is snoring in beyond there like a good son of the church with a quiet conscience. My third room is full of bottles, or I would go in there myself, but I have only two beds; you are welcome to mine——"

Quentin, ashamed to show so much appearance of nervousness as to accept this offered asylum from St. Aubin, or to dislodge him from his bed, laughed, saying:

"Oh, no! I don't mind. It was probably my imagination."

"No," said St. Aubin. "It wasn't that, I am afraid. Good night then. I must really speak seriously to Mamasha about this to-morrow. Mamasha is a very charming little person, but she will sacrifice her best and dearest for a mystery. Good night," and St. Aubin closed his door, rather more quickly, Quentin thought, than necessary. He heard the key turn with a feeling of desolation and returned from the chilly landing to his own room and bolted his door, and then he remembered that he might have asked the Count for a candle, but he was ashamed to disturb him again, and so lay down. Again he heard some raps underneath his bed and others upon the outer door, and once he heard a low laugh behind the door, at the head of his bed, then came one tremendous blow upon the panel, a thump heavy enough, he thought, to crush it in, then all disturbing sounds ceased, and he fell asleep.

XII.

When Quentin awoke it was broad day. He found, on consulting his watch, that it was nearly eight o'clock. Arising, he pushed his bed back into place, and then opened the door into the dressing room. Within, all was as he had left it the night before. He went into the further room. A gust of air reminded him of the staircase. Suddenly he decided to descend it. The door at the bottom was not bolted, but it was locked, and the key had been withdrawn. Puzzled by this, Quentin ascended the staircase again, took his bath, then returned to his room and dressed.

He came out on to the landing just as St. Aubin emerged from his room on the other side. A feeling of pity for the man arose within his breast, he was so unlike the rest of the human race. He answered the Count's greeting and followed the short misshapen figure down the stairs. The trellissed alcove was bare of guests, the table unset. As he neared the château, he saw that there were many travelling boxes standing near the gate, but within the great dining room no one was visible. Following St. Aubin's lead, Quentin passed through this room and found himself in a much smaller apartment, which he now saw for the first time. Here people were sitting about at small tables drinking their early coffee,

which the men servants were handing, and eating the usual light meal which is customary in France. There was a balcony outside. There Quentin penetrated, and found several of the guests taking their breakfast in the bright morning sunshine. Among them were Lord Eldon and Madame. Madame wore a round hat and a veil, which hung loosely downward and met the filmy lace of the scarf that encircled her throat. Alixe was not to be seen.

"Ah! there you are," called Madame brightly. "Come over here, my friend, and tell me how you slept."

"Not well, I fear," said St. Aubin, who had halted at Madame's elbow. "You call Mr. Quentin your friend, Mamasha, and yet you put him in the room at the head of the chalet stairs." St. Aubin's words were spoken in italics, as it were.

"I have always thought it half imagination," said Madame a little shamefacedly. "Were you disturbed, Mr. Quentin?"

Quentin was able to laugh carelessly.

"Do I look as if I had not slept?" he asked.

Lord Eldon scrutinized him carefully. In Quentin's fine color and thoroughly rested look, he perceived no sign of nervousness.

"Will you change your rooms and come over to the château?" asked Madame, with almost a tender note in her voice. "You see that presently we shall have any amount of room."

Quentin glanced in at the open French window. In almost every instance the women wore travelling dresses and bonnets, and most of the men were in rough tweed suits with alpine or straw hats lying close at hand. Had Quentin needed to be told that

there was to be an exodus that morning, that fact had already been openly confided to him through the piles of luggage which had been seen on the terrace. He thought that he, of all Madame's guests, had the best reason for a sudden departure, but he determined to remain at the Abbey for the length of time for which he had originally been invited, even though no one had so much cause to take flight as himself, for, whether there had or had not been manifestations of a supernatural character, he was willing to endure a recurrence of them only so that he might fill out his allotted time at l'Abbaye de Bref.

"What happened?" asked Lord Eldon. "Anything really authentic? You know I belong to the Psychical Research Society, and I shall be glad to report it for the benefit of the Society if you will give it to me in writing. Any witnesses, corroborative evidence, and that sort of thing?"

"Don't, Lord Eldon!" exclaimed Madame. "It will aid only in giving the château a bad name."

"But in the interests of science, dear lady——"

"Why shouldn't people know?" said St. Aubin. "I'm sure you do your best to let them know, Mamasha. The place is haunted beyond a doubt. If Eldon is sceptical, he had better change rooms for the night with Mr. Quentin."

"Rather allow me to occupy one of Mr. Quentin's rooms," said the rosy little gentleman. He rubbed his hands. "I should enjoy it immensely. I have never seen or heard anything of the kind, though you know the blue room at Eldon Towers is said to be haunted."

"You could not share Quentin's rooms," said St. Aubin decidedly. "In the first place they are too

cramped for any one man as they are, and in the second place the things, whatever they are, never appear to two persons at the same time. You must be alone."

Madame allowed her head to fall backward, she looked up out of veil-screened eyes at Quentin. "What did you see?" she asked in an undertone, and then added penitently, "Do forgive me."

"I saw nothing, nothing at all, I assure you." Quentin's tone was cold. Whatever the cause of his discomfiture on the previous night, he had gathered from the Count that Madame had expected it, and that she had not been unwilling to make him a victim to her curiosity.

"And you heard——"

"A few raps perhaps, but nothing else. Any one could have done that. A person standing underneath the floor of my room in the recess where we breakfast, could amuse himself and frighten a nervous person by the hour, if only he had a pole that was long enough. Fortunately, I am not a nervous person——"

"Did not the door open?" asked St. Aubin.

"Who told you that, Count?" asked Quentin quickly.

"You told me yourself."

"No," said Quentin, "I don't think I did. I couldn't have done so. It did not occur until after I went back to my room, and I——"

"Well, well, then, this morning as we came over to the château."

Quentin was quite certain that he had not mentioned the fact, though he now thought that it had occurred before he opened his room door.

"But even if you had not told me, I should have known it. It is one of Mamasha's expected things that always happen."

"Hush!" exclaimed Madame, sotto voce, sending her glance swiftly round the listening group.

"You needn't mind us, Mamasha," called Miss Spencer familiarly. "We all know those alluring stories, but we are much more afraid of the living than we are of the dead;" this with a sidewise glance at St. Aubin, parting retribution for some earlier real or fancied slight.

"A few harmless chemicals," said he, with a short laugh. "I had a little accident once, Quentin, and the dear old ladies never let me forget it. I haven't had one for years."

"If we get away without another, I, for one, shall be happy," returned Miss Spencer spitefully. Being classed with the dear old ladies was too much for her equanimity. "I admit that it was not so bad an accident as that of the Ocean Monarch."

St. Aubin turned his back on the speaker and said hastily to Madame, "Where is Alixe this morning, Mamasha?"

"She is in bed," replied Madame. "She had a sleepless night, at least she says so, but it is my experience that people sleep much more than they think they do. Now I, who never really close my eyes before three or four in the morning——"

"Oh, Mamasha! what a bad conscience you must have," said Bruno with playful earnestness.

"She said that she could see no one," continued Madame, ignoring Bruno's remark. "But likely as not, if I go up there, she will be off among the hills. She may be miles away by this time. Alixe is a

great walker. She heard in some way late last night about the Daniellis."

"Heavens! how you do harp on——"

"She can shut herself within the iron doors of the Abbess's room," continued Madame, drowning St. Aubin's reproof, "and no one can disturb her. Some people are so selfish in their grief. I loved Virginia Danielli as if she were my own chi—niece, but for me I must always go about wearing a smiling mask before the world."

"Oh, ze heartless whorl!" commented the Baroness, who was gazing up at St. Aubin as if begging him to spare her life yet another day.

Here Charles appeared at the window opening upon the balcony.

"The landau and the char-à-bancs are at the door, Madame."

"And my boxes?" chanted Lady Barnes, Miss Spencer and Miss Thorndyke in a soprano chorus.

"They are half way to the station by this time," said the Count. "I saw to that myself——"

"Oh, thank you! so good of you!" exclaimed all three, and then looked at Bruno to see that he had obliged himself more than them. There was the bustle and stir of rising.

"Must you go?" exclaimed Madame. "I am so sorry. Alixe will be too. She would wish me to say good-bye to you all. She cannot see you. She heard only late last night of the loss of the Ocean Monarch."

"Mamasha!" said Bruno. "How you do love to sup full with horrors——"

"And she has not slept at all, so she says. For me, I must always wear a smiling mask, etc., etc., etc."

Quentin, as he heard these words, thought that he understood the reason for the lonely light which he had seen in the night time from his window in the chalet, and the cause for the shadow upon the curtain and the despairing march to and fro.

"She will get over it," said Valery. "We all have to get over these things. My aunt was going out to India, when I was a little chap, and she was lost. She left me a tidy little sum, the foundation of my fortunes, and much as I loved her, I was in a measure comforted for her loss. It's dreadful to gain by the death of any one who is dear to you, but you can't help being more resigned than if you get not a sou marqué. Isn't that so, Bruno? Hulloa, man, what's the matter?"

St. Aubin was staggering backward, his hands outstretched to grasp the table, something, anything, that he need not fall. He stumbled against a chair and seated himself suddenly, trembling.

"It's pretty dreadful," whispered Miss Spencer to Quentin, "to wake up some fine morning and find that the girl you love is dead, but why one should mourn departed friends when one has a handsome wife of one's own, and that wife has a handsome fortune of her own——"

"Don't ask me to believe such a thing," said Quentin. "No one could imagine for a moment——"

"Well, I didn't until I saw him last evening. They were here just before they sailed—the Daniellis, I mean. Bruno did not seem particularly attentive to Virginia then, but he went off at almost a moment's notice, and they had a convenient telegram and started the next day——"

"The convenient telegram was, I believe, to the

effect that a brother of those people was dying. There could have been no collusion in that——"

"At all events they happened to join the steamer at Southampton in which he had crossed from Hamburg. They say that he tried to get them to wait for the next steamer, but they were set on going. Alixe is, certainly, with all her faults, the least exigeante of wives. She cared more for Virginia Danielli than for forty thousand Brunos, and we see how much he cared for Virginia, as he nearly faints away every time her name is mentioned."

"One would feel the loss of any friend in that terribly tragic way," said Quentin. He glanced at the pallid man seated by the table pretending to drink coffee from a spoon which trembled so that the brown liquid ran down upon his shirt front.

"But come!" said Miss Spencer. "I must get into the landau. I hate a wagonette, and they are sure to have one. I cannot ride backward. Mamasha is sure to save the pony chaise, which I dote on, for that 'first ride together.'" She looked archly at Quentin, then turned and rustled out through the salon. At the door she turned again and laid her well-gloved hand on Quentin's arm. "Promise me one thing," she said. "Don't, if you love me, stay in that dreadful chalet another night."

The question of love for Miss Spencer had not entered into the mind of Quentin to conceive, but he answered gaily,

"I am not afraid of spirits. When they find that I do not——"

"I am not thinking of heavenly spirits, not of elementals, nor of those who because of their sins have not been able to get away from the first or inner

circle that Lord Eldon is always talking about, but of a very earthly spirit, Christian-named Bruno. Be careful how you offend him. I wouldn't sleep under that roof with all those chemicals for all the— Yes, yes, Mary Thorndyke. I am coming, save a seat for me. Good-bye, again! Come to see me in Paris when you come up, Rue François Premier, or better still, meet me at Eldon Towers. I am going there a little later. Lady Alfred is an old friend of mine— Au revoir, in Paris."

Quentin followed his voluble friend out on to the terrace. As he stepped from the salon to the stone at the door he heard a faint shriek. There stood the Baroness pointing with her small brown finger at some demijohns which had been placed on the terrace while they had been at breakfast.

"Nitro-glycerine. I know it is," said Miss Thorndyke in a hurried whisper. "Come! dear Lady Barnes. Let us get into the landau before they dismember us quite."

St. Aubin by this time had also appeared upon the terrace. His voice seemed to have regained its strength.

"Drive the horses very slowly, Pierre Monrouge," he said seriously. "Even the rumble of the wheels is apt to explode them, they are so very sensitive."

"Oh!" shrieked Miss Jennings from the high front seat of the wagonette where she had taken her place by Eugene. "Is there no other way to the station?"

"Es gibt kein anderen weg nach Kussnach," declared St. Aubin, his low spirits flown to the winds, his face full of a concealed amusement.

"Wrap the horses' feet in dusters or something," screamed Lady Barnes. "Muffle them. Here, take

my shawl. The carriage robes, anything—perhaps I could walk," but Pierre Monrouge, at a signal from St. Aubin, had started off, a dull smile pervading his countenance. Lady Barnes was pulled down into her seat by Miss Thorndyke. She immediately thrust her fingers as far within her ears as her veil would allow, and shrank into the extreme corner of the carriage until they were a good mile from the Abbey. When the last of the guests had driven away, St. Aubin called to Charles to bring some glasses.

"What for, Bruno?" asked Madame anxiously. "Don't try anything here, I beg of you, Bruno."

St. Aubin was tugging at one of the great bottles, trying to raise it to the table in the recess. When he had succeeded, he uncorked the demijohn. "Be quick with those glasses, Charles!" he called impatiently.

"Oh, Bruno! Do not, I pray, I beg——"

St. Aubin tipped the neck of the demijohn and filled one of the glasses held ready by Charles.

"Bring some ice, Charles. Have a taste, Mamasha? No? It is only Evian, the purest water I believe that Switzerland affords."

Lord Eldon burst into a hearty fit of laughter, and Valery doubled up like the blade of a knife, and chuckled internally until he was crimson.

"Bruno," he said, "Bruno, I'll back you to play a practical joke with any man alive. Now we shall have the château all to ourselves. Mademoiselle, Baroness, Quentin, try some of St. Aubin's nitroglycerine."

"Yes," said St. Aubin, "wasn't it fortunate that the coming of the Evian and myself were simultaneous?"

XIII.

Quentin had seen nothing that day of the young mistress of the house—as he was now beginning to consider her. So far as he was concerned she had wrapped herself within that impenetrable veil which friendship may not unfold, which curiosity may not peep under, which derision and scorn have no power to force aside, the mantle of the dignity of silence. Quentin played billiards with Valery all the morning and listened to his amusing comments on Madame's aid in the opening of his boxes.

"She wants most of the universe," said Valery, "but I told her that I should like her to reserve a few of the ragged edges for Alixe and Gartha, whereupon she sighed. You know that patient sigh, a sort of put-upon sigh, that makes you feel that you have done nothing but impose upon her from time immemorial, and she said, 'Dear Valery, Alixe and Gartha will have everything after I am gone.' You would think Mamasha a woman of eighty when she is trying to get round the family, whereas she is only forty-three at the most." Quentin gave a start. He had thought his friend perhaps ten years younger.

Betrayed into expressing himself by Valery's frankness he exclaimed:

"She can't be that!"

"Who? Mamasha? Oh, yes, she is. She's a very

wonderful-looking woman, but she is older than she looks. Let—me—see, Mamasha was married at seventeen. Oh, yes, that's gospel; I know it," seeing the look of disbelief in Quentin's eyes. "My little wife," a wave of sadness passed over Valery's face as he said these words—"My little wife was born the year after Mamasha was married, when Mamasha was eighteen, in fact. Alixe was born when Mamasha was twenty-four with a few months to the good. Twice nineteen, well, call Mamasha about forty-three. Women have done some fatal work when they were on the wrong side of forty. You know about the General; he was probably Mamasha's second. Mamasha's past is shrouded in mystery—before Carleton, the deluge. It was great enough, however, to wash out any other footprints which were traced in Mamasha's sands of time."

"Carleton?" said Quentin inquiringly. "Oh, yes! I remember you told me something of the kind." He saw in memory the white headstone which contained the name of Allaire Carleton. This name was now to be explained by his frank friend.

"There! I've miscued. You can't even talk of Mamasha, Quentin, and not get into a scrape. After Mamasha's second died, the old General, you know" —Quentin nodded his head understandingly, and chalked his cue—"Lady Barnes came to congratu—I mean, condole with Mamasha. Lady Barnes had been freed from old Barnes for four or five months. He was a dreadful old rip. He had married the widow Thatcher. People called her the widower catcher. Well, to return to the episode. There! I missed my shot."

Quentin made a bridge with his fingers and leaned

over the table, apparently giving all his attention to his next stroke.

"Well, the two met. The one all tears and gush, the other all smiles and sympathy. Mamasha, they say, sat smoothing her crêpe and looking down. Alixe, Mademoiselle says, bought it for her at fifty-five francs the metre. Well, there she sat, smoothing it down and looking on the floor.

"'This is the second time,' she said, 'the second time.' The tears dropped on a black-bordered handkerchief, warranted to catch 'em without letting 'em soak through and spoil the crêpe.

"Lady Barnes smoothed her ten-francs-a-metre crépe in accompaniment to Mamasha's motions. Old Barnes had left her low in funds. She looked up at Mamasha with a hard bright smile.

"'It is the second time with me, too, Annie Carleton,' she said, 'but I live in the hope that there may be yet another. One can do nothing but try, you know!'"

"I should think Lady Barnes would hardly try again to any purpose," said Quentin, smiling at the story.

"Ah! but Mamasha. There's the girl for you! I have a great admiration for Mamasha. She can fascinate any one. There was a little American here named Ware, a common little outsider. She brought him home, and made him fetch and carry for her until I was absolutely almost tempted to tell him her age, but Alixe saved me the trouble. There! can you carom like that? Five cushions and the red ball! Pretty fair, I call that."

"What did she do?" asked Quentin breathlessly, fearing to hear he knew not what.

"Who? Alixe? Why, she only came home, that was all. She never looked at the little beggar of course, but after that Mamasha's puddin' was all dough. She's got a pretty level head, has Mamasha, with it all. The only mistake she made was marrying Alixe to that little inventor Bruno. He's a good enough fellow, as men go, but he's a perfect spendthrift. No head at all! He sends good money after bad with the greatest equanimity. No fortune can stand a strain like that, you know. My little wife" —a sigh—"and Alixe, were the only children Mamasha ever had."

"The only children!" gasped Quentin, finding his idol tottering, though he had been almost assured in his own mind of the truth since the morning in the glade.

"Yes, the only ones. Didn't know she was Alixe's mother? I declare! I had forgotten the little fraud Mamasha likes to practise. Oh, yes! she is my little Gartha's grandmother straight enough, a pretty young-looking one you'll admit."

"Valery! Valery!" It was Madame's sweet high voice. It came from her seat under the spreading tree upon the terrace.

"Coming! Coming, Mamasha! Just knock the balls about, will you, Quentin, till I get back. I wouldn't for the world let her know that I told you. I spoiled another little game of hers once quite unintentionally, not Harry Ware—some one else who was— Coming, coming, Mamasha;" and Valery ran out of the room cue in hand.

Quentin pushed the balls about thinking deeply. Meanwhile he caught a glimpse through the open door of a tall black figure, passing out of a further entrance.

It was Alixe. Her face looked drawn and sad, even at that distance, and Quentin judged that she had shed many tears. Had he but known it, they were even now welling over from her eyes and dropping down upon her black dress. A few minutes later he heard Valery's goodly sole crushing the gravel of the terrace. He joined Quentin with a self-satisfied air.

"Now, if you don't say anything, she'll never know I told you," was his first remark. "She asked me to remember my promise, and I told her I would. She then repeated what she has said to me a hundred times, that people have said that it was a very unnatural marriage, and that she preferred to pose as the aunt of Alixe, and let people think she had nothing to do with it. Did you ever hear such a lame reason as that? But I suppose it's all she could think of. Poor old Mamasha! There! I miscued again. That's what comes of talking of Mamasha. She's sure to get me into a mess sooner or later."

Meanwhile Alixe had joined Madame on the terrace.

"You are a perfect fright, Alixe," was Madame's greeting. "I never saw any woman look as ugly as you do when you cry. Your nose is all out of shape, your eyelids are like bags, your——"

"I know it," answered Alixe. "It makes me really ill to cry. I hate to cry, but oh, mother——"

"Hush!" Madame looked quickly toward the salon windows.

"Pardon me," said Alixe. "I am not considering appearances to-day. Oh! To think of it! Virginia dead! Drowned! Lost in that dark cold water. I shall never forget it. Never, never! I saw her all

last night holding up her hands. She was holding up her hands, my little Virginia, she was—calling—calling——"

"Who?" asked St. Aubin abruptly. He had joined them.

"Virginia Danielli," answered Alixe in a heart-broken voice. "She was sinking down, down into that icy sea. It was so black, so black! The great waves were curling over her head, and she was holding up her hands. You know what pretty hands Virginia had, Bruno. She did not turn to me. It was so strange, Bruno, she turned to you and begged you to save her, only to stretch out your hand, and you turned away, Bruno. You would not. Oh! you would not."

"You must have slept a little, then, Alixe," said Madame impatiently. "For that part of it must have been a dream. Bruno was not within——"

"No, no! It was not a dream. A waking dream if you will, for I walked the floor the long night through. I saw her ever, Virginia, my one dear friend, in that great expanse of sea. Bruno looked at her so coldly, so sarcastically almost. He did not stretch out his hand—did not——"

"What! what! Bruno? Alixe, do you think that no one has any feeling but yourself? Look at my poor boy! Eugene! Eugene! Go! Go! Some brandy, quick! quick! for heaven's sake!"

"Oh! forgive me, Bruno, forgive me," said Alixe bending over the now prostrate man.

"You know how weak his heart is, Alixe. How can you be so forgetful of everyone but——"

"I was thoughtless, thoughtless!" said Alixe, always ready to blame herself. "Run, Eugene, run!

Oh, Lord Eldon, come! Come here!" That nobleman hastened to the scene. His pocket flask was uncorked in a moment. "What is it? What is it?" he asked.

No one answered him. Alixe, with her hat fallen off, her pale face and swollen eyelids making sad havoc with her young beauty, was rubbing St. Aubin's hands. Lord Eldon forced some brandy down his throat and laid him gently prostrate upon the terrace. Alixe dropped to the ground, and took the strange dark head in her lap. She smoothed the crisp black hair, and put Madame's smelling salts to the pinched nostrils. In a moment St. Aubin opened his eyes and at once struggled to arise.

"No, no! You must not try to move, Bruno," said Alixe in a penitent tone. "You must forgive me." Her tears rained down afresh and fell upon his forehead. "But you know how I must feel. Virginia was my friend, my only friend, and that I should lose her now, never, never to see her again."

"Alixe! Alixe!" cried Madame sharply. "Have you no pity on the man? He must feel it as much as you do. There! see what your selfishness has done;" for he had again lost consciousness; "you know how delicate Bruno has always been——"

Valery, hearing the stir, had come out on to the terrace. Quentin followed, hesitated, and then stood still, feeling that this was a domestic matter in which it was not his place to meddle.

"Hulloa!" exclaimed Valery bustling up. "What's the matter? Fainted? Well I'll be blessed by the devil if I ever saw a man faint before."

St. Aubin had now opened his eyes again. He saw only the face of Alixe bending anxiously above

him. He rolled over and clutched her gown with his dark fingers. He buried his head in the folds of her sombre dress.

"Oh, Alixe!" he cried aloud. "Can you forgive me? Can you ever forgive me?"

"Forgive you for what, Bruno? It is you who should forgive me."

"He has lost his wits." It was the voice of the priest. "Get up, Bruno. Let me take you to the chalet. Will you help me, Valery?"

St. Aubin, sobered by the knowledge that he had other listeners than Alixe, allowed himself to be raised from the ground, and went toward his own rooms, leaning on Valery and Father Halle. Alixe arose and followed them slowly.

XIV.

QUENTIN could not repress a shudder of disgust at the misshapen and loosely hung figure. He turned away with a sigh that this should be the clog which tied Alixe down and would keep her from happiness as long as their lives should last. He was lounging aimlessly toward the steps which led down to the garden when Madame perceived him. Lord Eldon had just left her, and had passed Quentin going into the château. So soon as Lord Eldon had disappeared, Madame beckoned; Quentin went forward at Madame's summons, and joining her, he seated himself by her side on the bench beneath the great oak tree.

"I must explain a little to you," said Madame without preface. "I am sure that I know you well enough to speak confidentially to you." She looked affectionately into the eyes of her guest, and ended with the words, "You dear!"

"That was an awkward scene and a very painful one," she said. "I hardly know what to make of it. I never noticed that Bruno cared particularly for Virginia Danielli. She was the friend of Alixe. They were inseparable. She would not have left here but that she had received a cable saying that her younger brother was dying. He was in California. Dying, they say, of consumption. Virginia herself did not

look any too strong. I first suspected Bruno's fancy for Virginia when I found that they had crossed in the same steamer to England, or else that they had met over there. I remember now, she didn't go to Hamburg. The Daniellis joined the steamer at Southampton. They say that Bruno was there, and did his best to get them to wait over for the next one, but they made all their arrangements very hurriedly, as you may imagine—Ada Spencer was the first person who mentioned it to me——"

"Mentioned what?" said Quentin shortly.

"Why, mentioned the suspicion she had of Bruno and Virginia. Bruno hardly seemed to speak to her here, Virginia, I mean——"

"It seems ridiculous," began Quentin.

"Ah, my friend, one cannot control one's heart," said Madame with a pointed look.

"And why should he?" asked Quentin sharply. "With—with such a wife—a wife whom any man——"

Madame flushed angrily. She looked at him keenly.

"He, too!" she said to herself. Perhaps of all Madame's ephemeral fancies the one for Quentin had been the most lasting.

"You must think us a queer household, my friend," said Madame, raising her tone. "But I must explain a little. Bruno was the son of my sister."

"You had another sister, then?" asked Quentin.

"Yes," said Madame hastily. "My sisters were both very much older than I."

Quentin's quick mind began to reason. He saw that, if Valery had spoken the truth, this would make Madame seem as young as she chose to call

herself, but he crushed down these thoughts as disloyal and listened as she continued.

"I have thought ever since you came that I must explain to you why I feel so tenderly toward Bruno. I——"

"There is no reason why you should explain anything to me, dear Madame," said Quentin much touched, for he saw signs of unaffected agitation on the pretty features of his hostess.

"Yes, but I must. I wish you to know. It all happened when I was so young. Almost a little girl. I was devoted to the children. We all lived in a great old-fashioned house. My father, Colonel Gordon, wished us to be at home as much as possible. Bruno's father was a Spaniard. He was in the diplomatic service. He was away at the time, and my sister and her little boy were staying at The Beeches." Madame ceased for a moment. She took a filmy handkerchief from the bag at her side, and dabbed her face underneath the white veil.

"Don't," said Quentin. "I cannot bear to see you! There is no necessity for your telling me anything painful."

Madame gave a long sigh. There was already alleviation in Quentin's tone. He had not spoken so kindly since the evening of his arrival. All emotions as well as all occurrences were subject to Madame's desire for appreciation on the part of her friends, and she continued. "One day I was in the nursery with the children. I was but little older than Bruno." Quentin looked at Madame and could readily believe her statement. "I was not very strong then. He was a beautiful lad!" Madame's face was working convulsively. A tear rolled out of

her eye and down upon the lace guimpe of her chic morning gown. "I loved to take the child up in my arms. I had been forbidden to do so. They said that I should drop him, let him fall, that I should injure my spine and injure him. I put my arms round him, and he laid his head against my breast. I started out of the nursery door. I would go into my sister's room and show her how well I could carry the child. Just as I got half way along that dark hall, the nurse, who hated me, and whom I detested, called sharply, 'Miss Annie! what mischief are you up to now?' I started. I was frightened. I relaxed my hold of the little fellow. Oh! I shall never forget that moment. We were just at the head of a flight of stairs leading down to the kitchen regions. He fell from my arms, and down, down, to the very foot of that long flight. The woman's words forced exactly what she would have prevented. You can imagine how my father felt, how my sister felt. All medical skill was tried, but in vain. Beyond saving his life and reason they did nothing. He grew to manhood, just what you see him now, but thank God! he has never known that it was I who——"

Madame ceased, unable to proceed. She buried her face in the folds of her handkerchief, regardless of injury to her complexion or newest veiling from Virot. For once, she was natural, and Quentin liked her better than he had ever liked her before. Still there was one thing that he must say—

"Yes, and yet you married your——"

"I married my niece to him, yes." (Ah, Madame, what a mixture of hypocrisy and honesty you were!) "And why not? Bruno was more to me than any-

thing in the world. My whole life had been given up to him. I had ruined his. How better could I have atoned? I thought to give the lad a fortune—but alas!—well—well— His mother treated me to the day of her death as if I had been an intentional murderess! Oh! What I have suffered on account of that child! And how I love him! Alixe has supplanted me with him as she has with—" she stopped, her voice choked with sobs. "I thought she was everything to him, but these strange fits of his are recurring. I find they always overcome him when he is greatly agitated. I have not credited that gossip about Virginia Danielli before, but his words to Alixe asking her to forgive him! I am mystified, I must confess. I cannot understand it at all. However, he might love any one so far as Alixe is concerned. She has never been anything more to him than— Yes, yes, Valery. They are calling me." Madame rose hastily. "I will see you after breakfast, or perhaps you had better come with me, they may need some help. What is it?" she called. She ran along the terrace, and disappeared within the chalet arch. Quentin followed more slowly. At the head of the stairs she stopped and beckoned to her guest. "Come," she said, "come! I need some one who is strong. I cannot bear the sight if he suffers again." Quentin ran up the stairs and followed her into the room. He had hardly set foot over the door-sill when he heard the words, "We need no strangers here." They were Father Halle's chilling tones. "I begged him—" said Madame, but Quentin had turned on his heel and was gone. His swift glance round the room showed him St. Aubin lying on the lounge, Alixe sitting by his side, her hand

clasped closely within his own. It had alsc discovered to him more than perhaps was intended for him to see. He stepped across the landing at the priest's inhospitable words, entered his own room and closed the door. He sat down and thought long and persistently. The more he pondered, the more confused he became. He had heard so much of St. Aubin's chemicals and experiments. Where were the retorts, the colored liquids, the glass jars, used in chemistry? The powders, the tubes, and other insignia of the science? Instead of any of these, his eyes had fallen upon an open box. Here was a mass of machinery which the bent of his mind toward mechanism had taught him to appreciate and understand at a glance. If the Count was making inventions it was not, so far as Quentin had discovered, with the aid of chemicals. There was a jar standing on the table, and upon it the label, "Brown Powder." As to the box, it was a mass of machinery upon which Halle had suddenly closed the lid, at the same time saying quickly, "We need no strangers here."

XV.

That Valery was apt to speak his mind freely, Quentin discovered a little later, when he said:

"I'm a good Catholic, and there is no one whom I respect more than his Grace, and yet I must say that I can't see what he has got to say about whom Alixe shall or shall not have in her house."

"Was there really any reason for it?" asked Quentin.

"He said that he had been unfrocked," answered Valery, "but I imagine between you and me that the Archbishop was a little too severe. Something about Peter's pence, I believe. There had been some defalcation. Halle made it good later, but that wouldn't do. As long as he would not admit making away with it, he should not have returned it."

"I wonder why Father Halle should have hidden from the Archbishop," said Quentin, "if the family were willing to have him here."

"Hum—ha! Did he hide? Looks bad, don't it? Did he? Are you sure of it?"

"Quite sure," said Quentin, "but it is not my business to talk about it."

"I don't think Alixe believes the stories," said Valery, after a pause. "But Halle was brought up in the household. Mamasha adopted him, the child of an old friend, I believe. In fact, Bruno cried for

him, and Bruno had to have everything he wanted, from the top brick of the chimney to Alixe, as you see. Alixe thinks the punishment too severe for the crime, even if there was any crime, and he, Halle, protests to her that he knew nothing about it——"

"And yet was willing to make that money good?"

"Yes, that's where they caught him. Looks bad, but I really can't believe Bob guilty. Alixe and Bruno and Bob played together as children. It's rather a curious mixture. Mamasha is a good Catholic, and would like to obey the Archbishop, but I believe that next to her own soul, she loves Bruno, and if she were to put Halle out of the house, Bruno would never forgive her. There are wheels within wheels, as you will find, Mr. Quentin, if you stay long enough at l'Abbaye de Bref."

"He seems still to wear the priest's robe," said Quentin.

"Propriety forbids that he should discard it," answered Valery, with a laugh. "I don't suppose he's got anything under it. Poor devil!"

There had been so much and so varied excitement during the short time of Quentin's stay, that he rejoiced at the now prevailing quiet which the exodus of the many guests had brought in its train. There were remaining now only Madame Petrofsky, Alixe, Gartha, Mademoiselle, and the Baroness, while in the list of the stern sex he could discover no other names than those of Lord Eldon, Valery, the Count, Father Halle, and Quentin himself. A household of ten persons is not usually considered a very small one, but the great house party which Madame had been entertaining for some weeks past, and which, while it was ever changing in its personal units, was

usually full as to numbers, made the great château seem, by contrast, almost empty.

The breakfasting and dining al fresco were resumed at Lord Eldon's desire, but that seemed to be the only change worth noting.

Quentin would not listen to Madame's persistent request that he should remove his belongings to the château. He felt a pride in sticking to his post, in not being frightened away by a few draughts of wind which he could explain, and the rappings and openings of doors for which he could not so readily account, and he begged his hostess to allow him to remain where he at first had been installed, until he finally took his departure.

The time passed quietly. Billiards with Valery in the morning, drives or walks with Madame when she was not driving or walking with Lord Eldon, riding with Valery and Gartha all about the roads of the valley or the paths among the hills. Alixe had not appeared since he had seen her sitting by St. Aubin's side in the chalet room, and St. Aubin himself had not been seen again, the priest being in constant attendance upon him.

Toward the evening of the fourth day, Lord Eldon came to Quentin as he was smoking his cigar in the ruins.

"Mr. Quentin," he said, "I wish you to do me a favor." He spoke with brisk confidence. The peer was not accustomed to being refused a request.

"What is it?" said Quentin good-naturedly. He had taken a fancy to this rosy little gentleman with a face like a winter apple, and he thought that he saw in him a valuable factor in solving a problem whose complications somewhat annoyed him.

"I am very anxious," said Lord Eldon, "to sleep for just one night in your rooms. I have never in my life seen or heard a ghostly visitant. I have endeavored to do so time out of mind. I always take the side against the possibility of such an occurrence, although we have a well-authenticated ghost at Eldon Towers, but they never come within eyesight so far as I am concerned. Now, I am going to ask you, notwithstanding what St. Aubin said yesterday, to let me spend the night in your rooms."

"I have not the most remote objection," said Quentin, "only you must not let the Count find you out. You are a much older friend here than I am, but——"

"We cannot exchange rooms very well," said Lord Eldon, "unless you openly agree to it, and that you seem determined not to do."

"No," said Quentin, "I am not to be frightened away, but I am willing, if you prefer——"

"Now, I have my own theory about these manifestations," interrupted Lord Eldon, "and I want to prove it without delay. I am of the opinion that we two shall see whatever one alone would see, also that I shall hear whatever you hear when I am not with you."

"Very well," said Quentin. "But how do you purpose managing it?"

"Why, this way." Lord Eldon sat down on a great stone. "Give me a light, will you?" As Lord Eldon puffed he unfolded his plans. "After every one is asleep, I shall leave the château, go down the steps into the flower garden, between the terrace and the Abbey——"

"Why?" asked Quentin.

Lord Eldon puffed slowly. Then he took his cigar from between his lips and laughed.

"I see that you are no conspirator," he said. "I take that way simply because the soft earth paths give forth no sound. I could not possibly get over there from the château without my footsteps being heard on the gravel. I shall walk along to where the nuns' steps are built into the outer wall."

"I don't think I know the place," said Quentin.

"There is plenty to see in this old enclosure," commented Lord Eldon. "Well, when I get there I shall turn to come back, and will mount those far steps which are at the very end of the terrace."

"I must go there some time," said Quentin, remembering that Alixe and Gartha had appeared from that direction on the first evening of his arrival.

"Yes, but not to-night. They will suspect something. You can't imagine how suspicious those two men are," and Lord Eldon jerked his head in the direction of the chalet. "When I get to the top of the steps, I shall remove my bedroom slippers, which I shall wear for this occasion only, and proceed the rest of the way in stockinged feet."

"You are more anxious than most persons to see something supernatural," said Quentin, looking round at Lord Eldon and smiling at his anxiety to make himself uncomfortable.

"There, you know," proceeded Lord Eldon, "I strike the terrace, but it is not gravelled very well just at the end, so I shall make no noise, and in a few moments I shall come to the little board walk under the chalet windows."

"Just under the Count's rooms," said Quentin.

"Yes, but the balcony is overhead. From that

moment on, I shall be concealed. Then up the chalet stairs in a jiffy, and so into the haunted chamber. Now, isn't that a fine plan? Your rooms are on the right of the stairs, I believe. I wonder why they never put me there?"

"Perhaps, as happened this time, the rooms were always full," commented Quentin.

"The lantern is lighted, I suppose?" questioned Lord Eldon.

"Yes, usually," said Quentin, "though it did go out the other night, the night of my adventure."

"Ghost blew it out, I suppose," said the peer, smiling broadly. "Now you leave your door unlocked, do you hear? I shall go to bed early and get some rest, and when I am least expected I shall be on hand. When your door opens mysteriously, at the wee short hours ayont the twal, don't be frightened out of your wits; it will be only me." Lord Eldon's grammar, like that of many an English gentleman, left something to be desired, but lapses in grammar do not necessarily argue for lapses in courage. Quentin agreed to this plan quite readily.

XVI.

To his surprise, when he went to dinner at the ringing of the Abbey bell, he saw that Alixe had taken her place at the end of the contracted table. She spoke only to Gartha and ate little. When they had assembled in the salon after dinner, he saw her tall figure seated within the embrasure of a distant window.

As Quentin entered the room there was a crash of music. Mademoiselle and the Baroness, both accomplished musicians, were filling the room with the light-heartedness of the soul of Brahms as exemplified in some of his gayest waltzes. The Baroness was at the grand piano, Mademoiselle accompanying her at the little upright. Quentin loved music and listened delightedly. He seated himself in a deep armchair. There were lights at the piano only, the rest of the room being in semi-darkness. He glanced often toward the tall figure silhouetted against the evening sky. He did not approach her then. She seemed to withdraw from every one, and he was not so bold as to break in upon her solitude.

When Mademoiselle and the Baroness had played until Madame had become a little impatent, she replaced them as an entertainer of the small company. She gave, to Father Halle's accompaniment, some exceedingly florid vocalization in bravura style. St.

Aubin in his turn sang some Spanish songs in a singularly sweet tenor voice, which caused Quentin to stare at him in amazement, and Valery roared out a succession of hunting songs and some African ballads until he was red in the face. He sang "The Poacher," "Drink, Puppy, Drink," and "Im Tiefen Keller," with a ring and verve that were inspiriting. The one discordant note was an English song by the Baroness, which she called "The Loosed Cort." The title in this instance was prophetic, as the singer ended her song in a key a half-tone lower than that in which she had begun.

"Really, we make excellent music, do we not?" exclaimed Madame. "We must give a concert. We can have a charity performance for the hospital over in the village of Moncousis. Mr. Quentin, you sing, I know. Come and try something, anything. Robert Halle can play all music at sight."

But Quentin could not sing with that lonely figure in view. He arose, saying, "I am not in voice this evening, Madame." He walked slowly over toward the window. He sang well, and the idea of singing to the priest's accompaniment was not encouraging to him. Halle played the piano, as most players of the organ do, with a heaviness of touch, which was perhaps made up for, in a measure, by his certainty and method.

As Quentin approached the window, the tall figure sitting there moved slightly, and withdrew her trailing robe. He placed himself by her side, and looked abroad upon the wonderful night.

Alixe was dressed in some soft black material whose folds clung about her as she moved. She had discarded her jewels, all but the silver chain with its

great cross of amethysts. Quentin saw that it hung downward, hidden within the folds of her dress. He sat silent, regarding the musicians. He saw that Madame cast an occasional glance toward where he sat by the side of Alixe. He saw, too, that Halle, as he thumped out his accompaniment, often turned quickly and looked over his shoulder through the open door at his back, across the terrace, to the gate beyond.

"Do you feel cold, Robert?" asked Madame kindly.

"A little chilly now and then. It is nothing. Is the gate open?"

"The gate is never open, Robert; that you know well: we are perfectly enclosed at the Abbey; but why?" laughing. "Do you feel colder with the door in the wall open when all the windows and doors are flung wide, as you see?"

"Perhaps if the great doors were closed, there would not be as much draught," said the priest. But Madame gave no order this mild evening to shut out the air.

She glanced once or or twice across the great expanse of the interior toward the two figures in the window. Then she walked over to where they sat, silent. Not a word had been spoken between them since Quentin had seated himself.

"Alixe," said Madame, "why can't you play my accompaniments? You know how Robert Halle accompanies. He thumps 'In Deinem Blauen Augen' as if he were playing the 'Stabat Mater.' My voice is completely lost."

"Do not ask me to play to-night," said Alixe.

"What nonsense!" ejaculated Madame. "There is no reason why you should not play to please me.

We cannot mourn forever. Don't you know, Alixe, that there is such a thing as being selfish in your grief?"

"Yes," answered Alixe wearily. "I know there is. I am very selfish, that I know well, but oh, Mamasha! Let me be selfish for a little while longer."

Madame gave Quentin a glance eloquent of disapproval, and clicked back to the piano.

Quentin had heard the voice of Alixe only when she had answered Madame. She had not spoken to him. Nor did she speak to him now.

They sat, still, silent, as two ghosts. It was to Quentin simply a companionship, which was sweeter than the talk of crowds.

Suddenly the priest struck the opening chords of the mad song from Lucia. So soon as the notes fell upon her ear, Alixe arose hastily. She drew her breath sharply. "Oh, do not sing that!" she exclaimed.

"Absurd! Alixe," answered Madame sharply. "Are we never to return to our own ways just because——"

Alixe stood partly in the ray of the moon, partly in shadow.

"Robert Halle," she said, in a tone of command which Quentin had never heard from her before, "you shall not play that song. Stop! I order you. Anything—anything else. I will not have it. It was the last song that Virginia——" Her voice broke and she sat down hurriedly.

Halle without a word took the sheet of music from the rack, and replaced it by another.

"I had better go away," said Alixe. Quentin did not feel that she was speaking to him. It rather

seemed as if she were in a reverie. "I am only a spoil-sport." As she spoke, she pushed the low panelled seat outward and the long window swung over the terrace. Quentin arose hastily. He followed, and passed her by, perceiving where her path lay.

XVII.

He ran down the stairs ahead of her, which was a fortunate move on his part, for in the darkness her foot caught in an encroaching vine. He heard her stumble, and before she should prevent, she had fallen against him. He turned quickly, and caught her in his arms. She drew back, so soon as she felt the necessary resistance which his steadfast form gave her, and stood upright. She gave a swift, sharp sigh, and stood looking at him for a moment from wide-open eyes, as if some secret thing had suddenly been revealed to her. He saw but a glance. It was to him but the look that perhaps a friendless child might give to a kindly disposed elder person, but it comforted Quentin in the many dark days that followed.

They paced down toward the abbey. Quentin talked hurriedly of indifferent things. Alixe was silent. He did not know if she listened or no. As they entered beneath the arch which opened the way to the ruin, she stopped and faced him.

"Mr. Quentin," she said, "I ought to ask your pardon for making Mamasha's guests so uncomfortable. First my husband sends half of them off in a hurried flight because of his poor harmless chemicals, and then I annoy the rest of you because I cannot contain

my feelings. It—it is hard to learn to control one's feelings, I find—to learn to forget—all at once."

They paced along the interior of the ruin, sometimes in deep shadow. The leaves which showed above the top of the abbey wall, cast shadows across her fair face. She walked the length of the enclosure and seated herself upon a low, bent limb. It was where Quentin remembered to have seen the gay bevy on that first day at afternoon tea. How different now! There were no filmy lawns and gay colors, no bright and saucy voices sending badinage from one corner to the other. There was little light. The angles of the building were dark and ghostly. Quentin and Alixe were the only beings who occupied the lonely enclosure. She was robed in deepest black; the waist of the gown came high and covered her throat. Her arms were encased in long sleeves. The only things about her that sent out a spark of light were the amethyst cross hanging at her side from its string of beads, and the glint of her fair hair with the silver combs shining palely in the moonlight.

"I should like to talk to you a little, if I may." She looked at him inquiringly, almost pathetically. It seemed as if she would say, "If I may not talk to you, where can I turn?" Quentin said nothing. She waiting for answer, saw permission in his eyes.

"The subject is tabooed within the château," she began. "It is of Virginia Danielli that I would speak. Mamasha says that it makes me cry and look ugly, and indeed, she is right, so it does. No, do not pay me a compliment, I beg of you. I know just how it makes me look when I weep. It makes me really ill. It convulses my whole being. I cry very seldom. I have wept like this but two or three times in

my whole life. Once when the dear old general died. Ah! Had he but lived! The other times were——"

She ceased.

Quentin did not ask when those times had been. He thought that he could imagine.

"For some reason," continued Alixe, "it makes my husband extremely agitated when I mention my friend Virginia, and it is not to be wondered at. She was here full of life and spirits so short a time ago! And I find that Robert Halle feels almost as strongly about it. Mamasha does not like it. She loves all gay and bright things—Mamasha—" a sigh—"and I must keep silent before her. I cannot cloud Gartha's life with my sorrow. We have kept the fact from her. And so——" She looked up at him questioningly. "May I tell you about Virginia?"

Quentin did not speak. He felt that words were superfluous. He stretched out his hand and took hers within his strong grasp. Alixe gave his a friendly pressure and then withdrew her own, and laid it by its fellow upon her sombre-hued knee.

"As a little child my life was particularly lonely," she began. "I need not go into the reasons. (No, thought Quentin, you need not, but I am beginning to understand those reasons.) But that it was so, is an unpleasant fact. Then, as an older girl, I was obliged to do many things which were especially repugnant to me." Quentin remembered Miss Spencer's words about "those girls being hawked about to half the capitals of Europe."

"Finally, in some of our wanderings, I met this young girl Virginia. She was but a little older than I. I was first attracted by her merry laugh, truly the merriest laugh that ever I heard. It was conta-

gious. There was something within me that needed and responded to just such a cheerful even nature. She was always laughing, my Virginia. The first thing in the morning you heard her sweet note; it was like the note of a bird. How often have I heard it here in this very spot, where we are sitting—" she broke off with a sad little laugh; "but I don't know why I should, after all, trouble you with all this, Mr. Quentin. Like the needy knife grinder, I have no story to tell. She was just sweet and lovely, and my friend, my friend! She was here——" Alixe paused and looked around at the darkened corners of the walls of stone. "Can it be possible that she was here only three weeks ago? Now they tell me that she is gone; that I shall never see her more. How can I believe it? How can I? Virginia dead! Virginia dead!" She paused for a few moments. Quentin saw that her lips were moving, although no sound came from them; then in the stillness he heard the dropping of a tear, then another. Alixe put her hand to her face and brushed the tears away as a little child might have done.

"It is nothing," she said. "It has grown to be a habit. Do not mind. How can I tell you how lovely she was? No words of mine could make you understand it." She ceased. There was dead silence within the cloistered ruin. Quentin did not seek to break the spell.

"You know, Mr. Quentin, that there are some persons with whom one cannot associate the thought of death. Virginia was one of those. I should never have imagined her dead. I could not, but for those awful visions that pursue me at night. Connecting Virginia with death seems to me absurd, incongruous.

Yet—yet—she comes to me; she comes to me at night, always begging Bru—that is, my husband—to help her. It is strange, that hallucination, and I know it. She does not come asking aid of me. She does not laugh any more, she does not smile, she only raises appealing hands, and begs and prays to be saved from that cold, dark death." Still Quentin did not speak; he felt that this was simply the outpouring of a heartbroken soul, and that he, as himself, played little part in the matter. He was simply a receptacle, little better than the empty air, but he was a listener, and that is all that certain bereft creatures desire: some one, any one who will listen.

Alixe sat looking up at the shifting clouds which crossed and hid the moon at times, at others parted to allow it to shine brightly forth. Sometimes the light flooded her face. It was during one of these moments that Quentin, still silent, still gazing upon her, saw that her face assumed a rapt expression, and that she began to speak, to whisper, her voice hardly making itself heard above the gentle rustle of the leaves of the old tree upon whose limb she was sitting. The scene in the glade came back to him. "The man is nothing to me," she had said. And then again, "I shall probably see little of him." Could that have been but a few days ago? Less than a week? How much had come and gone since then! Her tears were falling more slowly now. She withdrew her eyes and rested her gaze on Quentin's.

"You are strong," she said. "You are quiet. You give me peace."

Quentin reached over and took her slim hands again in his. He pressed them in his strong ones. Then he released them. It was not much. It was to

last for a lifetime, for he knew now that this was to be the thing of a lifetime with him.

"Thank you," said Alixe. "I should think that I had cried away all my tears. Tears for Virginia. Had you only seen her, Mr. Quentin, had you only known her, you would understand. You have noticed that picture above the grand piano. The picture of Santa Barbara. That is Virginia to the life. Only she was more simple, not so stilted as that lovely saint. But she wore her hair just as that is worn. She was always laughing at me for my untidyness. She will never laugh at me, or with me, again." A silence for a time during which there were strange rustlings among the branches, and the sound of the dropping to earth of bits of crumbling stone, the inevitable wearing away of that ancient pile which must continue to crumble until it had vanished from human ken.

"I saw her again last night, Mr. Quentin. I have not told the others, no one but Bru—my husband. They laugh at my fancies. They say that I am always full of fancies. She was with me the whole night through. Sometimes she walked with me, as she used to do, her pretty hands in mine—she had such pretty hands! such little hands! they felt so lost in my great paw."

Quentin glanced at the long, slim hands lying in her lap. There was no plump prettiness about them, but they were handsome, refined hands, strong in character. "Sometimes she was hanging on my arm, as in the old days, only three weeks ago, Mr. Quentin, think of it! Only three weeks ago! Looking up in my face, but never laughing. She never laughs any more and her nature was always so joyous! Virginia

was the embodiment of joy. She was forever laughing. Then, again, I saw her sinking down, sinking down in the dark waves, in the wide, black sea. She was stretching out her arms, begging, praying to be saved, but not to me. That was so strange. Not to me, but to—to my husband, of all persons! She did not care for him nor he for her. I was her friend. He often asked me when she was going away, as if he did not wish her at the Abbey. I remember one very strange thing. On the day when I told Count St. Aubin that Virginia must sail in the next steamer, that they had cabled her to do so, he behaved very unaccountably. I have often wondered if he could have had some premonition as to her coming fate. He asked me why she could not remain over until the following week. He was himself starting at once for Hamburg to take that very ship for Southampton. It seems that Madame Danielli's man of business in London had cabled her the news of her son's critical condition. There were many persons going to America at that time, and it was the only steamer in which he could get passage for them. I remember my husband asking why they could not sail later, or earlier, even. I have never been able to understand this, but he knew how I loved Virginia, and if he had a premonition, as I sometimes think, he was perhaps trying to save me from this grief. Virginia was my one friend. It is a great thing to have one friend, Mr. Quentin."

Quentin made no answer. He did not offer her his friendship. He had said all that he meant to say. If she did not feel that he was her friend for all time, no words of his could persuade her of the fact.

They sat on the branch of the old tree for a space.

The sobs of Alixe grew less frequent; there was occasionally a long-drawn catching of the breath, but she said no more. Suddenly the silence was broken by the slight stumble of a foot and a smothered exclamation. Quentin caught sight of the red spark of a cigar at the old arched entrance to the ruin.

XVIII.

"ALIXE," called a voice. "Alixe, where are you?"

It was St. Aubin's voice.

"Here, Bruno," she answered. "I am with Mr. Quentin."

Quentin half arose.

"Do not get up," she said. "Bruno will find us."

She made no effort to rise, nor did she move further away from Quentin, and he was obliged to admit that she had been no nearer to him than conventionality allowed. Strange to say, he experienced a slight feeling of irritation when she remained seated. There was no secret between them, except perhaps that faint pressure of her hands, and doubtless she would frankly allude to it before this creature to whom she was chained, and give Quentin an excellent opportunity for mortification.

"Come here," she called. "It is lovely here in the abbey." She moved a little nearer Quentin, to give St. Aubin a place to seat himself should he be so minded.

St. Aubin came near, and glanced at them carelessly. He was evidently much preoccupied.

"Ghostly old ruin!" he said, as he stumbled nearer his wife. "How can you sit here a minute longer than you have to? Do you know, Quentin, that you are close to the oubliette where they used to confine

the nuns? That was when they did something worse than usual; and the wall just behind you, that double shell, where some of the stones have fallen down, is the spot where two especially obstinate ones were immured. I always expect to see their ghosts when I am here after dark, which, however, is not often, I can assure you."

"You will have little to dread if you see no other ghosts than those, Bruno," said Alixe, rising and laying her hand on his shoulder.

St. Aubin started perceptibly.

"What is it, Bruno? Are you getting nervous, too? How you tremble."

"It is nothing," said St. Aubin, shaking off her hand. "You are always fancying something," he added. There was the sound of voices growing near.

"There they come," said St. Aubin. "Mamasha is always uneasy for fear she lost her latest. Here we are, Mamasha."

As St. Aubin spoke, several figures entered the ruin, and, crossing the open space, joined those standing there. Madame began to interrogate Quentin as to how long he had been in the abbey church, if he did not care for music, if he did not feel the chill of the night air, when St. Aubin had joined them, and if he did not find it terribly eerie out here in the ghostly old ruins.

Quentin warded off these inquiries with forced laughter. It deceived Madame, however, who looked at him with scrutiny. It seemed to her that sentiment and he must now be strangers. While Madame was plying him with her questions, St. Aubin had laid his hand on the arm of Alixe, and had drawn her along the interior of the abbey to the further doorway.

Here a grass-grown terrace above the tops of the ancient dungeons made a footway broad enough for two persons to walk abreast.

"I wish to speak with you, Alixe," St. Aubin had said in passing through the opening.

"Yes, Bruno," she answered gently. She followed his lead, and together they began to pace up and down outside the walls. Here they were screened from the sight of those within the ruin. They were silent for a while. Alixe, forgetful even that Bruno had said that he had something to say to her, forgetful of all but her own grief, asked no question as she walked beside him.

"I wish to ask you a favor, Alixe," said St. Aubin.

She was looking abroad upon the misty fields silvered by the moonlight, and did not answer.

"Alixe!" She started at the somewhat impatient tone.

"Yes, Bruno," she said.

"I—I wish to ask you something," again repeated St. Aubin. He stopped in his walk, hesitated, and was silent.

Alixe had also stopped. "Well, Bruno," she said again, "what is it?"

St. Aubin had turned toward the crumbling wall and stood there pulling, almost unconsciously, at a dead vine, which, loosening in his hand, scattered its withered leaves upon the ground.

"Do not do that," said Alixe. "Do not!"

He, unheeding, with a final great rip and jerk, tore the vine from its holding.

"That is the vine that we planted together last year —Virginia and I. I hoped that it might have lived."

"It is dead," said St. Aubin, stolidly.

"Yes, I feared that it was dead yesterday, but I meant to try to restore it. I thought that with care I might. There was perhaps some little spark of life remaining——"

St. Aubin threw the trailing spray upon the ground.

"You can never make it live again," he said. "You cannot bring the dead back to life. That is an old axiom."

Alixe shook her head slowly and sighed.

"I fear not," she said. "Not any more than my love can bring her back to life—Virginia!"

"Alixe," said St. Aubin impatiently, "how long will you continue to harp on that one string? I for one am tired of it."

"Harp on one string? You forget yourself, Bruno. Harp on one string? I have not troubled you with my grief! The news is not so old to me that the expression of my sorrow can be called harping. Do you not think that I am tired of it, too? Oh, so tired of it! And I must be tired of this dreadful fact for all the years to come. Perhaps when I have mourned Virginia for ten or twenty years, you may say——"

"Well, let me hear no more of it, Alixe. I am weary of it. You annoy every one. Grief for the dead——" St. Aubin stopped. He shuddered. "It is chilly out here," he said. "I hate the place. Grief for the dead cannot bring them back." Alixe renewed her pacing. St. Aubin kept step beside her.

"There is just one thing that makes it the more bitter, Bruno. I did not go with Virginia to the steamer. She begged me to, and I refused. That is the cause of my remorse. Did you ever feel remorse, Bruno?"

Alixe did not say, "You would not allow it," or

"You objected so strenuously that I gave up my will to yours," but St. Aubin answered sneeringly:

"And you are now trying to put the burden of that also on me?"

"Also, Bruno! What do you mean? What else have I ever tried to place to your blame? What have I——"

"No, no!" said St. Aubin hastily. "I do not mean that, Alixe, but it seems like a reproach to me. Mamasha did not wish you to go, Gartha was ailing. They were here alone, and I thought that you had worn yourself out enough for the Daniellis—she usurped my place, Virginia Danielli—she——"

"She took no place but her own," said Alixe. "She was the first with me and ever will be. I accepted your reasons," she added sadly, "but, oh, remorse is a dreadful thing! To feel that I refused the last request which she made of me; that I might have gone with her; that I might have seen the last wave of her hand—the last smile on her lips—the last——"

"Cease!" St. Aubin shouted in a voice of thunder, and then perceiving the look of astonishment on her face: "Pardon me," he said, in a softer tone, "but I can bear no more. The Daniellis were my friends, too, Alixe. It was a great shock to me, as well. I would have prevented their going in that steamer if I could have done so——"

"Poor Bruno," said she apologetically. "I am, as Mamasha says, a very selfish person." Alixe drew a long sigh. "You could not have known that any accident would happen to that steamer. Poor Bruno!" She laid her hand upon his shoulder and looked down into his face. "You must forgive me. You will, Bruno? You will?"

St. Aubin, finding her in so soft a mood toward him, broke in suddenly.

"I have something to ask of you."

"I am only waiting," answered Alixe with spiritless voice. "What is it? My grief has made me thoughtless. Have I refused you anything that you have asked for?"

St. Aubin thought of the late sale of two valuable pieces of property, and answered with lowered head and faint voice: "No. But this is something that I have never asked before."

"Anything! anything that I can do for you; you know very well that you have only to——"

"I should like you," said St. Aubin, speaking very fast, and in an almost inaudible tone of voice, "to let me change my rooms in the chalet and come over to the large house."

"Bruno!" exclaimed Alixe in a low voice, "have you seen anything, really?"

"Nonsense!" said St. Aubin. "I wish to come over——"

"You will leave the chemicals behind, I suppose," said Alixe, with the ghost of a smile.

"I wish to come over——"

"And why not? I am sure you are as free of the Abbey as I am myself. The place is yours as much as mine. I have always told you that."

"You do not understand me, Alixe."

"Oh, yes! Yes, I do. You wish to change your room and come over to the château. Will Robert change too? I suppose you will still keep the laboratory——"

"Halle can go to the devil!" burst out St. Aubin in a violent tone, and then: "Excuse me, Alixe, but

you wilfully misunderstand me. Halle may go where he pleases, but——"

"Have you had a quarrel, then?"

"I am not talking of Halle. It is of myself I am speaking. I wish to come to the château and take the place that is mine by right."

St. Aubin stretched himself to the greatest height that nature allowed and looked upward into the eyes of his wife.

"Take the place?" Alixe gazed at the misshapen creature before her. "I hardly understand you. Are not the servants respectful? Have you any complaint to make? I seldom give orders, as you know, Bruno, but if you will tell Mamasha, she, as you know, manages all, she will——"

"You purposely misunderstand me," said St. Aubin in a harsh voice. "Look me in the face if you please. You may be the Duchesse di Brazzia, your foolish mother saw fit that you should keep that title —but you are my wife, I am your husband. I have been your husband in name for eighteen months——" He broke off and gazed searchingly in her face. "I mean to come where you are, live where you do—I mean——"

"My rooms are fitted for me only," said Alixe coldly. She drew away from him. "The Abbess's chamber was never intended for more than one person. Besides, I was promised"—she shrank further away—"I was assured by my mother that it was my fortune that you wanted, to continue your inventions; that I had so much that I ought to share it with you; that you could not accept it unless I became your wife, but that all was to be as before. It was a very matter-of-fact bargain. Why, we were playmates,

Bruno"—Alixe's voice was shaking—"playmates in the old days. You are to me like a brother." She stopped, choked; then resumed hurriedly: "Besides, Bruno, look at me. I am living in another world. The ghost of Virginia walks beside me the whole night through—the whole night through! She weeps and winds her hands about my arm, and she calls upon you to save her—to save her from those black waves. Why should she call upon you, Bruno, upon you?"

At these apparently innocent words, St. Aubin stretched his long arms upward, his passion turned all at once to rage.

"You devil!" he shouted.

He seized the girl by the shoulders and shook her in his frenzy with the strength of a being who partakes somewhat of the nature of a dwarf.

"You devil!" he shouted again. "You beautiful, innocent devil!" he screamed hoarsely. "What do you know? What do you suspect?" At these desperate words—

"What? What is it?" called Madame's voice. "Are you hurt, Bruno? Are you ill?"

There were sounds of running feet. They found Alixe standing as if turned to stone. St. Aubin had fallen at her feet. He was clutching at the grass and trembling as if in an ague, whether ill from some sudden sickness, or ill from anger, or from both, Madame could not determine. She had had long experience of Bruno's temper.

Alixe did not stoop to raise him, nor did she wait to see what the outcome might be. With no further look at his grovelling figure, she passed in through the doorway, across the open space of the ruin, and

out again beneath the curves of the arch, deaf to the nervous cries of Madame or the loud orders from Valery. She went with swift steps up the stone stairs, across the strip of terrace and through the salon, empty now, though still glittering with its many brilliant lights. She mounted the circular stair which led to the Abbess's chamber, and entering there, she closed and bolted the iron door of her refuge, remnant of a century long dead, when a woman's chamber needed to be her castle, and thus she shut herself away from the strife of her world, as the lady abbesses had often done in the olden time.

Alixe walked the floor for many hours that night. Virginia appeared to her no more. That sad pleasure was ended. Suddenly Alixe felt that she was warring with a much greater trouble—a living trouble. She found herself face to face with a new difficulty. Something had come to her which she had never expected or dreamed of. Why she should have hoped for immunity from the common lot of women, it is impossible to say. She found suddenly that she was to be free no more than the rest of womankind. She paced the room the long night through. When the early dawn began to show itself upon the opposite hill, she threw herself into the ancient prie-dieu which had served the mother abbesses for ages, and there she poured out her soul. She was not of the church to which those good women had belonged, but she was suffering as they may have suffered in days long dead. Common sisterhood made them one. She prayed, her face in her hands, the tears streaming through her fingers. When her broken words ceased, she still knelt there, more at peace than she had been

since the news of Virginia came to her, wondering what she should do.

Quentin sat smoking within the seclusion of the ruins for a long time after the others had left. The wandering breezes of night made their presence known by an occasional rustle overhead among the leaves, which rose above the walls of the Abbey and so caught the movements of the night air, but no spirit came to disturb his reflections. He sat there in a dream, a maze. He had awakened. He felt as if he had not lived before, and yet such living was more painful than the moribund state from which this new spirit of life had called him. He pondered upon one subject only, and was lost in that. His thoughts were futile and worse than useless, but they would not down. So there were skeletons in this household, of all households that he had ever known the most peaceful in appearance. Its name signified a quiet retreat, which called up memories of past holiness and calm. All had seemed as still as the surface of a pool enclosed between high hills, a spot which no harsh wind could ever search out to destroy its peace; and now he found that that smiling surface hid a boiling cauldron which might bubble and foam into dangerous billows at any moment. In this sunny paradise, then, serpents lurked in shadowy corners, there was a worm gnawing at the heart of every fair flower. Here ghosts walked not by night only, but stalked boldly forth in the light of day, not the revenants of little Gartha, but haunting shades, which made this lovely woman's life a life of misery.

XIX.

Quentin was aroused by the clear tone of the Abbey bell. It struck the half hour. Could it then be so near midnight? He threw his cigar, which had gone out while his thoughts burned fiercely enough to have relighted it, into a corner, and rising he passed out of the archway, walked slowly up through the arbor, mounted the stone steps, and went along the terrace toward the chalet. He ascended the stairs, entered his room, changed his evening shoes for bedroom slippers, and his coat for a smoking jacket, and then finding that sleep and he were at daggers drawn, he pushed open the long French window and went out on the narrow little balcony. Here he began to pace to and fro. He mechanically lighted a cigar as he walked up and down, up and down, in front of his window, utterly lost in vain and perplexing surmises. Unthinking, he extended his walk the length of the balcony, oblivious that he might be encroaching upon forbidden ground. He had nearly reached the end of the veranda, when suddenly he was recalled to things mundane by finding himself opposite an open window from which a light blazed forth. An involuntary glance within, a flashlight picture as it were, showed to him St. Aubin lying upon the bed, and the priest at the window which gave upon the public road. Halle's back was toward Quentin. He was leaning

out of the window, and seemed to be pulling at some rather heavy weight with a hand-over-hand motion. Quentin heard the words from St. Aubin, "Tell him that you will meet him in the glade to-morrow, and pay him, Bob; I have no money by me at present."

Quentin started back and turned himself about. He knew that he had stumbled upon something which was not intended either for his ears or eyes. That a mystery was afoot, he felt certain, but that it had nothing to do with him, of that he also was sure, and he was convinced that whatever these two worthies were planning, with regard to their midnight explorations into the realms of science, that he, personally, had nothing whatever to do with it. In the space of a moment these thoughts had flashed through his brain and he had at once faced about, but Halle had turned for a moment to answer St. Aubin, and in that moment he caught sight of an intruder. He released his hold on the rope. There was a cry of pain from some one underneath the outer wall, not heeding which Halle came striding across the space between the window and the balcony. His face had taken on a paler cast than ever through the passion which suddenly consumed him. Quentin did not know the man; he was transformed. St. Aubin sat up in the bed, and stared at Quentin with angry and astonished eyes. Quentin did not retreat, as he felt that this was no time for it. The priest's words rolled forth from foam-flecked lips.

"So we have a spy among us—a spy among us! Are you aware, Count"—turning to St. Aubin—"that this gentleman, who comes as a guest to the Abbey, has been set, or has set himself, to spy upon us?"

Quentin's astonished and indignant expression showed St. Aubin at once that the priest had plunged himself into a foolish mistake.

"Go easy, Bob," he said in excellent English, and then, letting his gaze rest on the intruder: "Pardon my saying to a guest of the château, Mr. Quentin, that these rooms are private, and that when——"

"A spy sent by His Grace!" screamed Halle, shaking his fist at Quentin. "You conceal your religion underneath a Protestant cloak, sir, but I have had my doubts of you, I have——"

"Bob! Bob! don't be a fool!" reiterated St. Aubin, who was becoming more convinced each moment that Quentin was there by accident and not by premeditation. "You must excuse his words, Mr. Quentin; you know that inventors guard their secrets very jealously, and Halle——"

"You are right, Count St. Aubin," said Quentin, whose face was becoming as white as the priest's. "I came here quite by mistake; I was thinking of—of—other things; I assure you that I am more than sorry, and I apologize, Count, to you. As for Mr. Halle, his methods of life seem to have made him suspicious of the most careless and open actions in all with whom he comes in contact. I am Madame Petrofsky's guest. I shall be leaving soon; but while I am here I demand from you, as the master of this house, respectful treatment at least, from this unfrocked priest."

"There, Bob!" said St. Aubin with a sardonic grin, "see what you bring upon yourself."

Halle's face grew livid. He seized a chair by the back, as if to hurl it in the air. Quentin, instead of dodging behind the shelter of the wall, with a "Par-

don, Count," sprang into the room and threw himself upon Halle and held him with a grip of iron.

The priest struggled to free himself. He might as well have been a fish within a net. Quentin's training stood him in good stead, and he held this man, as tall as himself, with the ease that is produced in muscles which are strengthened by daily exercise.

St. Aubin slipped from the bed to the floor and stood facing the two.

"You idiot!" he said, apostrophising the priest. "Mr. Quentin is, as I said, in the right. Why should he care to become acquainted with our little inventions? You see a discoverer in every shadow. It is an automobile, Mr. Quentin, and I firmly believe that persistent working over it in secret has driven Halle mad. Yes, I do, Bob. He is afraid that some one will steal the knowledge that we have gained by long and faithful study. Apologize to Mr. Quentin at once, you mild-mannered son of holy church."

Quentin did not let go his hold on the wrists of the priest.

Halle stood writhing about and sulkily glaring defiance, first at Quentin and then at St. Aubin. He panted like an animal who has outrun his strength. "He has dogged my steps ever since he has been here, ever since he arrived," said the priest. "He has followed me, and watched me, and spied upon me until I have been convinced that he is in the pay of the church to hound me to the gallows."

"The gallows!" exclaimed St. Aubin in a shaking voice. "Good God! Bob, what are you talking about? Mr. Quentin, the man's mind is going. You must pardon this madman, without further apology.

I really believe that his troubles in the church have crazed him."

"I do not think he is mad, Count," said Quentin. And then looking Halle in the eye, with as insolent a tone as he could command: "I did not know before that stealing was a hanging matter in France—I thought that it was nothing less than murder that"—

At these words the priest writhed desperately and tried to escape from Quentin's grasp. He snarled like an animal, and bent his head trying to bite with his strong white teeth the wrists of the hands that held him, but he was helpless as an infant in the hands of this athlete.

"That is not fair, Mr. Quentin," said St. Aubin. "Halle has been accused, it is true, but unjustly, as my wife and I both——"

"Be silent!" shouted the priest. "For God's sake, do not speak her name here."

Quentin felt more respect for the man at these words than he had ever felt before. All the time Halle was twisting, turning, and trying to look over his shoulder, and dragging Quentin by these movements a little nearer the table. Quentin, glancing in that direction, saw that a convenient revolver lay ready to hand. St. Aubin walked to the spot and took the weapon from the table and into an inner room. He returned in a moment and locked the door after him.

"This is new to me," he said. "A madman like that may do anything. Release him, Mr. Quentin; I will answer for his good behavior. Now, Bob—now, Bob——"

Quentin loosened his hands at once, but did not retreat from the near presence of the priest.

"Mad!" exclaimed Halle, raising one arm in the air in denunciation. "And if I am mad, you know who has driven me mad." He shook his clenched hand in St. Aubin's face. "You know who has persuaded, and urged, and cajoled me, until I am as deep in the mud as you are in the mire. You know——"

St. Aubin had stood regarding the priest with wide-open eyes of astonishment. He broke in then, drowning Halle's words with his own.

"Stop!" he shouted. "Stop! for God's sake, stop! Do you know what you are saying here, before this stranger?" Halle closed his lips and bit them savagely. "I knew you were queer," continued St. Aubin. "The knowledge has been growing upon me of late, but upon my soul, Bob, I did not know that it had come to this. If Mr. Quentin did not know us all better, you might almost make him think that we are a band of thugs, plundering and murdering right and left. You——"

"And what else are——" began the priest.

St. Aubin interrupted him quickly, shaking his head sadly.

"To think of it!" he said. "To think of it! My own old friend! Mr. Quentin, go away now, if you please. He will be right, I think, in a few moments, and then no one will be as sorry as he."

"I do not like to leave you," hesitated Quentin, looking at the priest, who still stood in the middle of the room, his hand stretched forth in denunciation, though the words seemed frozen upon his lips.

"Go, go!" said St. Aubin. "I can manage him. Go! To please me, go!"

Quentin, at St. Aubin's words, had stepped outside the window.

"Oh! you can manage him. You!" burst forth Halle. "As you have managed him before, as you are managing him now, as you will manage him until you send his soul seething in wickedness, and rotting in crime, to the hottest depths of——"

"Really! I have never known him so bad as this," said St. Aubin, with an anxious eye fixed upon the priest. "I have never told any one; I have kept him from a maison de santé thus far, but——"

"Had I not better remain?" hesitated Quentin. "Shall I call for——"

Halle broke the sentence by springing toward the window with a panther-like leap, but St. Aubin, fearing some injury to Quentin, was upon him. He seized the priest from behind and wreathed his arms about him and struggled with him, panting out the words, "If—you will—only go—I can manage him." St. Aubin's tone was so decided that Quentin reluctantly withdrew. As his retreating steps grew fainter, St. Aubin released Halle, and with a quick whirl faced the tall man about. He stood staring steadily at the priest. His gaze seemed to intensify with each succeeding moment—to penetrate—to burn. Halle stood rigid and stiff. He glared back at St. Aubin, at first defiantly, but after a little his eye began to quail, his glance to flicker and droop. A change came over him. His figure seemed to relax. His arm, the denunciatory arm, dropped by his side, he shivered, and fell into, rather than seated himself in, a chair.

St. Aubin neither lowered his eyes nor changed his attitude. He stood as if carved in marble.

"Look at me!" he said. "Look at me!"

He drew Halle's wavering eyes to his own and held them there. Whenever they wandered, as if they

would steal away from the burning reproach of St. Aubin's gaze, they were recalled by a something that seemed to glow deep within that gaze, and which held them whether they would or no.

St. Aubin finally began to speak. His words came slowly forth with an intonation of such scathing, probing sarcasm as caused the priest to quiver as if he felt the cuts of a lash upon the bare skin.

"And this is the way in which you keep your promises—your more than promises, your oaths, you chicken-hearted dignitary of Mother Church, you trustworthy ecclesiastic!—oaths which, when broken, place both our lives in jeopardy. Is this the faith that I can place in you? Is that the extent to which I can rely upon you? You wretched weakling! Rushing into the jaws of discovery and death, and dragging me with you, just because an innocent visitor at the château happens to stroll past the windows here. The hangman's noose, indeed! I can tell you, you black-robed devil, that before I submit to the hangman's noose at your behest, you shall be adjudged a lunatic by all the experts in France."

As St. Aubin proceeded, Halle half arose and drew slowly toward him. He came like a dog fearful of being beaten, his tall body bent, his attitude one of cringing supplication.

"Stand off! Do not approach me! Do not touch me! A pretty friend you! I thought that at least, though you had no consideration for me, you might have some for yourself. I thought——"

But Halle was on the floor, kneeling and holding to St. Aubin's feet.

"Cease, Bruno, cease! I was mad, indeed, mad! mad! I see it now. What did I say? What did I

do? Some one came, did he not, to spy upon us? Upon you and me! Only a guest of the house, you say? By accident, you say? If you knew in what dread, what terror, I live day by day, night by night! I hear stealthy footsteps hunting me down. I hear voices when I move along the terrace in the dark. That night when I lurked in the wood, while the Archbishop was at the château, I heard them all about me. They say: 'There he goes! Seize him! Seize him!' Even when I play ghost at your bidding, I am afraid, afraid of myself, of my long shadow, which sometimes creeps, creeps, before me, sometimes comes behind. When I go up those dark steep stairs, I hear footsteps other than my own. They walk beside me, they rise tread by tread, as do my own, and while I am haunting others, I myself am haunted. Do not make me do it again, Bruno; do not make me do it again." His voice had sunk into a whine. It was as the whimper of a terrified child.

"Get up, you coward!" said St. Aubin fiercely. "You will do it again, when I order you. This very night, if I say so. A fine assistant I chose to confide in! To aid me in my inventions, my inventions, do you hear? My inventions! for that is all they are. Get up and let me hear no more of this nonsense, or I will have you locked up in a madhouse." There was an ugly glitter in Halle's eye. "You will tell? Then tell, and be damned to you!" St. Aubin, short in stature as he was, stood over the tumbled heap beneath him. "Tell, I say, and be damned to you! Who, do you think, will believe your stories, the stories of a dishonored and excommunicated priest, against whom the Archbishop will be only too glad to appear? Who do you think will believe the tales of

a wanderer and fugitive from holy church, against the word of the Count St. Aubin, who is—who was—through his wife, one of the richest nobles of France?" As St. Aubin mentioned his wife's name, the priest shivered as if he had been struck.

"Aye, cringe and shiver and cower! You are too deep within the toils to escape now. There is no way out of it, any more than there is a way of escape from the nethermost hell for your deep-dyed soul—your deep-dyed soul—and—and—mine!"

St. Aubin stood looking down at the shaking heap before him. There was a convulsive sob.

"Crying, are you?" He gave the tortured creature a kick with the toe of his patent leather shoe. "Get up!" he said. "Get up! you sacerdotal sneak! Do you hear that brute howling under the window? It is a wonder that he has not awakened the entire house. Go and lower the rope down to him again, and see that this time you do not let it slip, or I will see to it that you play me no more such tricks."

When Quentin entered his room once more, he found Lord Eldon sitting there, composedly smoking his pipe and reading *Figaro*. He looked up as Quentin came in through the open window. "I have locked the door," he said, in a matter-of-fact business tone, "and have been examining the premises, at least so far as this room is concerned. At what time do they usually appear?"

"I was disturbed about midnight," said Quentin, "but I don't feel as if anything short of an earthquake could wake me to-night. Where will you sleep? On the lounge or in the bed?"

"I'll just throw myself down on the lounge," answered the peer. "You had better go to bed as usual.

What was all that howling down in the road some moments ago? I heard voices, too, but I was interested in——"

"Something I had no business to mix myself up in," said Quentin rather slowly. "It's getting late, Lord Eldon. If we intend to give the ghosts the ghost of a chance, we had better go to sleep and be prepared to receive them." Quentin laughed as he said this, and going into the little dressing-room, he soon reappeared, ready for the night. "I thought that I was tired," said he, "and somehow I am suddenly unaccountably sleepy. Are you comfortable there? Why not take my dressing gown?"

"Don't speak so loud," said Lord Eldon. "I don't want them to know that I have broken the rule as to apparitions."

"Are you comfortable?" again asked Quentin, this time in a loud whisper.

"Right as rain," replied Lord Eldon as he settled himself on the soft mattressed lounge. "Wake me if you hear anything. Oh, by the way, don't you bolt the door?"

As he spoke the little man rolled off the couch and was at the door leading into the dressing-room. He shot the bolt with a loud noise. "There! We're right as trivets." He then threw himself upon the lounge. "Now be sure you call me if you—you—hear——" The rest of the sentence was drowned in a polite little snore, and Quentin was also soon in the land of dreams.

XX.

It was in that mysterious hour between midnight and early morning, when all the world is still, that Lord Eldon's easily awakened ear, anxious for the summons, was greeted by a tapping upon the outer door. He arose at once, delighted with the success of his plan. Fearing greatly that he should hear a voice that he knew, he called sharply:

"Who's there?"

There was no answer. This pleased him beyond words to express. He hastily lighted a candle, whispered to the still sleeping Quentin, "The enemy is upon us," and went hastily toward the door. He turned the key, which, heavy and old, grated in the lock, and stuck for a moment persistently, but with a remonstrant screech it finally gave in to superior force, and Lord Eldon threw open the door to find the lantern burning dimly, but giving out enough light to show that no human or other being was present. He stood there, rubicund and smiling, his joyous face giving evidence that at last his life-long wish was about to be realized. He was standing, looking eagerly down the stairs, when he heard a fresh knocking. This time it sounded within the room. Reentering and locking the door after him, he went back to his couch and awaited further developments. Either the sounds of the second knocking or else the squeaking of the key had disturbed Quentin, and he

sat up in bed half awake, calling out, as had Lord Eldon, "Who is there?"

He had forgotten for a moment that his room held another occupant than himself.

His guest stepped lightly to the bed. He placed his plump hand over Quentin's mouth and whispered in his ear: "Hush! They have come at last. Get up and let us watch together."

Quentin, fairly drunk with sleep, slid from his high bed and joined Lord Eldon on the lounge.

"If the knocking comes again," said Lord Eldon, "I want you to call out boldly, 'Who is there?'"

They sat, hardly breathing, each with his own theory regarding the manifestations, and each anxious to see what would happen next.

The moonlight was glinting palely in at the window, for it was just being quenched, so far as the chalet was concerned, by the trees on the opposite side of the valley. As the two investigators sat silent, awaiting developments, there came three distinct raps on the door leading into the dressing-room. Lord Eldon started up as if to go toward it, but Quentin held him in his place with a whispered, "Wait a moment." Then to Lord Eldon's surprise the door which he had bolted swung quietly open.

"By heavens!" he exclaimed aloud, at the same time springing toward the doorway. There, nothing rewarded his gaze. The room was dark, for the windows were closed. He thought that he heard footsteps beyond him.

"Give me a light, Quentin," he whispered. Quentin lighted a candle with which he had been careful to supply himself, and together they passed through the dressing-room and so on to the closet. Here a gust

of air pulsed upward, and Quentin fancied that he heard the shuffle of a foot upon the stair. He ran to the stair, and took a few steps downward, but it was so pitch dark that he was obliged to call to his guest to bring the light. This Lord Eldon at once did, but upon examination the door at the foot of the stairs was found to be securely fastened.

"Is it locked?" asked Lord Eldon.

"Yes," said he.

"Is the key in the lock?"

"No," said Quentin.

"Any one possessed of the key could easily enter from the outside. Oh, dear! Dear me! There go all my hopes!"

"There is no doubt that any one possessed of the key could enter from the outside, but how do you account for the opening of the door into my room? You saw that door open, which I myself saw you bolt."

"H—m—m—I forgot that," said the nobleman.

They retraced their steps, going through the dressing-room into Quentin's bedroom. "Light some candles," said Lord Eldon.

As Quentin had taken care to see that he had those that would burn, the apartment was soon a blaze of light, and seemed all at once to lose its mysterious aspect, but this did not put a stop to the manifestations. There came a knock upon the outer door again, which was followed by three or four heavy blows.

"That is easily done," said Lord Eldon. "Oh, dear! Oh, dear! My beautiful hope, that at last I was to see or hear something supernatural, has flown. There is nothing here that cannot be explained. Any

one could do that—knock, I mean, and run down the stairs, and away in the darkness, before you could unlock the door. The key is bigger than the key of the Bastile and grates as slowly in the lock."

"You forget the opening of the door. That has still to be explained," said Quentin, who hated to have his previous night's vigil ridiculed and set at naught.

A gleam of pleasure lighted up the round face of Lord Eldon.

"We still may find a mystery," he said. He placed his glasses securely on his nose and went over to the door of the dressing-room. He took a candle from the table, bent down, and scrutinized the fastening carefully. "No hope," he said ruefully. "I suspected as much." Quentin joined him, and together they stood regarding the door, which, when it had swung open, had carried the hasp and a square piece of the frame of the doorway with it. That part to which the socket for the bolt was attached had been separated from the rest of the framework by having been carefully sawed around, and when the door had swung open, the whole thing had gone together.

There was a perceptible falling of Lord Eldon's rosy jaw. "What a disappointment!" he exclaimed. "You see that they counted on your being so terrified that you would on no account approach that ghostly door, and they thought, naturally, that when you had been driven from the chalet by foul means, as fair means would not accomplish it, they could restore it to its former condition."

"They?" said Quentin, astounded. "Whom do you mean?"

"That I know no more than you."

"But the motive. You must always look for a motive. What reason could any one have to play such a trick on me?"

"Ah! that remains to be discovered," said the Englishman. "It is very evident that they do not want you in the chalet for some reason."

"What about the other night when I was here alone? Could they do such a thing twice?"

"Nothing easier," said Lord Eldon. "Just fit the block back again at the first chance. See here! They've even oiled it so that it would slip easily. Did you bolt the door the other night?"

"I don't remember," said Quentin. "But I believe I did."

"Who do you think is up to these tricks?" asked his visitor.

"I hardly like to say. In the first place, as I told you, I can see no reason for them."

"Do you suspect Madame?" asked Lord Eldon with an anxious tone. He looked at the younger man soberly and keenly as he spoke.

"Not in the least," said Quentin decidedly. Lord Eldon smiled again. "I think she believes as thoroughly in a ghost of some sort over here in the chalet, as you wish to believe yourself. Some one said that she always puts a stranger over here that she may procure undeniable proof that the visions do really appear."

"Has any one ever seen an apparition?" asked Lord Eldon, holding hopefully on to the last, to his hopeless theory.

"I know nothing about that," replied Quentin. "I know only that I heard nothing the first night I slept here, and though I have been disturbed since, it was

no more than an unpleasant annoyance. I really think, uncanny as it all was, my one desire was to have the thumping stop that I might get some sleep. There was one queer occurrence of which I have not told you," he added, and Quentin then related to his friend the circumstance of his finding the priest asleep in the dressing-room, without, however, mentioning the part that Alixe played in the sequel on the following morning.

"That is very easily explained," said Lord Eldon. "I am afraid we cannot conjure up any sort of mystery. When that little brute, St. Aubin, goes away, he carries the key to his side of the chalet, the rooms across the landing. I have heard Madame complain about not being able to get into the apartment to have it cleaned until Bruno got back. The priest, finding that he could not get into St. Aubin's rooms, where he always lodges when here, got the key and entered from the outside. He is like one of the family, and always has been, he——"

"But why didn't he sleep in the château?"

"Didn't I hear that the Archbishop was here the first evening? That would explain it to my satisfaction."

"Yes, and to mine. The first words that I heard him use were with regard to Halle's disgrace in the church and his being an unfrocked priest. Madame, being a good Catholic, would obey the Archbishop to avoid trouble, though she is, in a way, fond of Halle as St. Aubin's friend; and though the Duchess may think that Halle is in no way to blame, she would consult his feelings, and, moreover, she would wish to prevent a scene in the house during His Grace's visit. Halle himself probably had his rea-

sons for keeping out of the way, and now that St. Aubin has returned, he can always find an asylum with him."

The words asylum recalled to Quentin's mind the reproaches which St. Aubin had hurled at Halle in his presence. He sat lost in thought. After a few moments he looked up at Lord Eldon.

"I feel like a conspirator," he said, "but I think I shall have to tell you what I unwillingly heard last evening. The priest is undoubtedly crazy and imagines the most absurd things, as I think you will agree with me when I have told you." He then repeated to Lord Eldon all that had passed from the moment when he was aroused from his reverie by finding himself close to St. Aubin's windows, until he returned to his rooms and found his self-invited guest sitting there.

"It does look as if the man was insane," said Lord Eldon, "but if he is, St. Aubin has no right to keep him here among these women. No one can answer for such an individual. St. Aubin is certainly very good to harbor him here, but he had better think of his own safety, it seems to me. Some fine morning we shall find him in that room with his throat cut, for, from what you tell me, I can see that this priest, in his moods, is capable of anything. He wishes for some reason to make you vacate these rooms. You would hear if St. Aubin cried out, and then you would have to rush in, and in that way bring yourself up as a witness in a very pretty murder case. If I were you, Quentin, I would not sleep with the windows on the balcony open; he is a dangerous fellow, that priest! To my certain knowledge, St. Aubin and the family have been supporting him and defending him

for years. What an ungrateful beast he must be."

"And those inventions——" began Quentin.

"I don't wonder that you are suspicious," replied the Englishman. "All these mysteries tend toward that result, but there can be nothing harmful in a few chemicals, so far as I know. St. Aubin has never endangered any life but his own. Gartha's cat, I believe, is the single exception."

"Twice have I seen into the interior of those rooms," Quentin answered. "Unexpectedly, it is true, and on both occasions the covers of certain boxes have been closed quickly before my very eyes; closed, too, on a mass of clockwork and machinery."

"Nothing strange in that, Quentin. I have a machine shop myself. If you will come to Eldon Towers, as I hope you will a little later, for the shooting, I will reward your best shots by showing you how far my experiments have succeeded."

"This is the 13th, isn't it?" asked Quentin.

"Yes, yes. I am late this year, it is true, but I shan't be long now," said Lord Eldon. "Now as to machinery, I believe you have some fancy that way also, haven't you? Now, which do you consider the best method on which to run an automobile, electricity or gasoline?"

Thus led away from the subject in hand, Quentin fell into a long discussion on the relative merits of the two propelling agencies, which lasted until the sun came pouring in at the windows above the roadway, which Quentin threw open, and the priest and his strange behavior were forgotten for a time. Not entirely, however, as the following episode will show.

XXI.

Lord Eldon made himself as presentable as the circumstances would permit, and was about to leave the chalet rooms to run down to the little river for a dip, as some one came running up the stairs. It was St. Aubin, who met him face to face.

"You, Eldon!" said he. "You nearly tumbled me down again. You are making an early visit to Quentin's rooms."

"I went there last night," answered Lord Eldon imperturbably. "In fact, I spent the night in his rooms."

"You spent the night there?" St. Aubin's face flushed angrily, and then grew pale.

"Yes, I spent the night there. You know, St. Aubin, that I am an indefatigable seeker after knowledge of a certain sort. I had heard of your nightly visitants, and I wished to prove or disprove the tales by the evidence of my own senses."

"So you left the rooms which my wife had prepared for you," began St. Aubin in an angry, sarcastic tone, which he changed almost at once on seeing Lord Eldon's haughty and astonished face.

"Pardon me, St. Aubin. I had no idea that there was a mystery to maintain. I came over here merely in the interest of sci——"

"Nor is there any mystery to maintain," broke in St. Aubin. "It seems strange to me, however, that two of our guests should conspire——"

"Conspire!" exclaimed Lord Eldon indignantly. "Where is the conspiracy? When one announces beforehand that he is going to sit up and watch for the supernatural, he is certain to get it, and plenty of it. I have tried that before. I nearly killed my younger brother Ottley, who thought he would give me a fright. No, no! I wished to judge for myself, without heralding my determination."

"And were you satisfied?" questioned St. Aubin, looking searchingly into the face of his guest.

"More than satisfied," replied Lord Eldon. "Come and see."

"I saw Quentin going up the hill a half hour ago," said St. Aubin as he turned into the room. "That was the reason why I thought it strange to find you here."

"Did you think I would run away with the tub or the candles?" laughed Lord Eldon. "From Quentin's account the candles are not of much—ha! He thought the rooms empty, no doubt!" This sudden change of tone and subject was caused by the sight which met his eyes, and which he indicated to his host with outstretched hand. They halted in the middle of the room, gazing at the priest, who was just straightening his bent form from a close and obviously hurried scrutiny of the bolt, which should have held the door in place. In his hand he held a screwdriver, and as he started away from the neighborhood of the door, the partly restored hasp swung out of place and hung downward with a tell-tale rattle.

"Ha!" said Lord Eldon, "evidently thought the occupant gone!"

St. Aubin turned on the priest with cold anger in his look and tone.

"What are you doing here?" he asked freezingly.

Halle stood, looking awkwardly at the two.

"I am breaking the eleventh commandment," he answered with an attempt at bravado and the ghost of a smile on his pale face.

"You are hopeless, Robert Halle," exclaimed St. Aubin. "What business have you to tamper with the doors of the chalet? Is there any reason for it?"

Halle turned sulkily away, muttering something about always having been in the habit of repairing the locks in the house. That he had started early on his rounds——

"May I ask how Father Halle got into this room?" asked Lord Eldon. "He was not here when I left it a few moments ago, and did not pass me on the stair."

"Through the window probably," said St. Aubin carelessly. "Don't bother your head again about it, Bob, while our guests remain. It is true, Eldon, he is in the habit of repairing the locks. I had forgotten that." There was a sudden rush of cold air from the third room or closet which swept across the faces of all three.

"I intend with your permission to probe this thing to the bottom, St. Aubin," said Lord Eldon. "I have seen so much now that——"

"Your freedom is rather more than that of a guest," began St. Aubin, but Lord Eldon had walked hastily through the rooms and to the further staircase, from which now a faint light shone. He ran down the stairs and found the iron door at the bottom open the width of a crack. The key was in the lock, but on the outside. St. Aubin had followed him to the landing.

Lord Eldon took the key from the outside of the

door, placed it on the inside, turned it in the lock and came hastily up the stairs.

"I can see no reason for Father Halle's trying to deceive me," he said facing St. Aubin angrily. "Why didn't he answer my question truthfully?"

"Bruno," said the priest, "how long are you going to allow Lord Eldon to speak to me in that tone? You said that I came in by the window. Is not that enough? What does Lord Eldon suppose I want in Mr. Quentin's rooms? Does he think that I wish to steal some of Mr. Quentin's belongings?"

"Father Halle's previous record," began Lord Eldon, now thoroughly angry——

"Go back to my rooms, Bob," said St. Aubin, fearing a more serious outbreak. "I insist. I will not have any quarrel between you and Lord Eldon."

Halle turned on St. Aubin a resistent and defiant stare.

"Go!" said St. Aubin. He looked Halle steadily in the face for a moment, and as he looked, the priest began to waver, then his eyes fell, he dropped his tools with a loud clang upon the floor, and facing about, he went out of the room and across to the opposite chambers. Lord Eldon then closed and locked the door.

"Now, St. Aubin," said he, "I wish to have this out with you. Come over here. See there! where the bolt has been loosened by sawing round it. See the marks of the chisel afresh in those screws." St. Aubin followed his guest quickly across the tiled floor. He knelt down and examined the marks of which Lord Eldon spoke.

"Yes," he said reluctantly. "It is all true. The man must be perfectly, insanely mad. I have thought

him queer for some time. He turns on me for the slightest cause, perhaps some fancied wrong, and denounces me to my face, and threatens to denounce me to any or every one. I do not know what to do with him. The poor fellow has no other home but this. I really think that his troubles have unsettled his mind." There was a knock at the door. Lord Eldon opened it, whereupon he found Eugene standing on the threshold. Eugene said that he had been sent by Father Halle to say to Lord Eldon that Mr. Quentin's sleeve links were quite safe. Eugene looked puzzled as he delivered the sentence which he had been empowered to repeat.

"That will do, Eugene," said St. Aubin, closing the door.

Then turning to Lord Eldon: "The man is undoubtedly crazy. I cannot see what spite he has against Mr. Quentin. A week ago he had never seen him. I cannot think what fancied spite he has taken against you. Of course I shall take the key of the door, and bolt it well, but a lunatic will discover some way to get into the room of a person whom he dislikes, and I fear that I cannot be answerable for Mr. Quentin's personal safety, if he persists in sleeping in the chalet."

"And I should not be answerable for Father Halle's," said Lord Eldon, laughing, "if he tried any trick on Quentin. He is a capital shot, though firearms do not enter into the subject under discussion. He was the coach of the Harvard nine, and one of the crew which beat us over in England some years ago in athletic sports. He comes highly recommended in every way. I judge him to be a man of great courage and spirit, and I should not advise Father Halle to

annoy him too much; he might pitch him out of the window."

St. Aubin's face reddened.

"Then, too," continued Lord Eldon, "do you think it right to keep such an irresponsible person about?"

St. Aubin tossed his head backward, as if to throw off a feeling of irritation; then he said:

"We must try to control him. We must watch him. I should not like to send the poor fellow to a maison de santé, but if it comes to the worst——"

And they left the room together.

Lord Eldon started down the stairs.

"I am coming down in a moment," called St. Aubin after his guest. "Breakfast must be ready."

St. Aubin watched Lord Eldon until he disappeared under the archway leading out to the terrace. Then he crossed the small landing and opened the door of his room. The priest sat in a chair by the window looking out upon the road and the hillside. His long body was doubled up and bent, his elbows were on his knees, his head in his hands.

St. Aubin closed the door, and stood staring at the tonsured head. Halle did not appear to have heard his entrance. He did not look up.

"Well," said St. Aubin, "what have you to say for yourself?"

The priest now raised his head, and sat regarding St. Aubin with half-closed eyes, the lids of which trembled visibly. Occasionally he cast them down, then took a long breath, and, raising his head determinedly, looked his tormentor in the face.

"What have you to say for yourself?" repeated St. Aubin.

There was silence for a time.

"I asked you a question. Did you hear me? What have you to say?" persisted St. Aubin.

Halle drew a sharp breath. Then he opened his lips. At first no words came, though they seemed to be struggling through some barrier. He cleared his throat hoarsely, then said slowly:

"I told you in there," nodding to the rooms across the hall. "I have broken the eleventh commandment—I have been found out."

"The only commandment you ever did break, I suppose." The priest, at the sneer in St. Aubin's tone, straightened himself and looked at him savagely.

"Bob," said St. Aubin, in such a tone as a judge uses when he pronounces sentence, "you are getting utterly unreliable. I fear that I cannot keep you here longer. Only last evening I received a letter from the Archbishop, saying he had heard that you were about here again, and that he will denounce me if I harbor you. You let yourself be seen outside. I cannot be responsible for your mad acts or your madder speeches. Why, after a time, if I allow you to remain here, and say and do the things you say and do, people will begin to think that I am really the man that you try to make me out. They will begin to believe that I, like some bewildering siren, have actually beckoned you from the path of rectitude, that I have lured you from the high plane of virtue, not to say holiness; in fact, you will finally make them believe that I am as utterly depraved as you are yourself." At these words Halle dropped his head between his hands. He spoke, and his words came to St. Aubin in a sort of hoarse whispered ejaculation.

"Oh, my good Lord!" he said. "Oh, my good Lord!"

"He is not listening, Bob," said St. Aubin, with a grin of malice. "Remember that you are no longer a disciple of holy church; you are no longer her pious, faithful son. You have the confidence of no one. You have become a pariah, Robert, my sometime friend; one who skulks along the by-paths of the world, a creature who is afraid of his own shadow; you have become that thing of scorn, an unfrocked priest."

Halle again raised his head and looked at St. Aubin. Two words escaped his lips. "You devil!" he said, and then again, "You devil!"

"Now, Bob, no heroics. Let me say once for all, that if you cannot carry out my orders better than you have of late, you may resign the position. When Alixe knows all, all that I shall tell her, when I make her understand, when I explain about Virginia Danielli——"

As St. Aubin began to speak, the priest interrupted him with the words, "And what about yourself?" but at the name of Alixe he fell upon the floor at St. Aubin's feet.

"Mercy!" he groaned. "Mercy! Have mercy."

"It would do you no good to say that you will retaliate, Bob; as the children say, 'Tell on me.'"

"Have mercy, Bruno, I beg of you. Have a little mercy. She is the only soul in the world for whom I care; her good opinion the only one for which I seek."

"And you have gone a good way to work to get it. Don't try the moral dodge, Bob," said St. Aubin sneeringly. "Anything but a moral priest."

"I loved her long before you thought of loving her, Bruno," continued Halle, unheeding the interruption.

"When they made me a priest and cut me off from the chance of ever telling her so, they cut me off from all that earth held for me of heaven. She is the only creature that I believe in. Her regard, her friendship are all that keep me from confessing the truth—the truth, not alone as it concerns me, Bruno, but as it concerns us both. Do not push me too far"—the man's voice broke—"do—not—push me too far, or I shall confess; I shall confess all, from the day when I first met your hellish face, to the very moment, when I, on my own behalf, come to declare the truth about Virginia Danielli——"

"It is high time that you took your departure for an asylum, my friend," said St. Aubin coldly. He stood looking down upon the wretch before him. The priest's face was wet with streams of tears. He was sobbing in his throat. "A maniac's cell is the only place for you. The only thing to save you in the eyes of those men is the suggestion that you are insane."

As St. Aubin said the words, "Those men," he nodded across the landing toward the rooms which Quentin occupied.

"You will not say it to her—to Alixe, Bruno—Bruno! Bruno, you will not."

"I shall wait and see how you behave. But no more blundering, Father Halle. I warned you against that wild plan, loosening that block every evening, and screwing it up every morning. A stupid, foolish plan. But you must perforce have your own way, and now see what it brings upon you! Now, get up! Get up, I say, from the floor, you drivelling hound; haven't you any self-res——"

There was a knock at the door.

"Breakfast, Monsieur le Comte," said the voice of Charles.

"Very well, in a moment," called St. Aubin in his gayest tones. He turned to Halle. "Wash your face, you heavenly innocent, and come down as if nothing had happened. I shall make Quentin think that you imagine yourself insulted by him. It will be a devil of a job, but don't you spoil it by speaking or trying to make any explanation, or it's all up with us—with you, rather, for I do not intend to be ruined in the eyes of any one by a priestly hireling, whom I have fed and clothed and cared for since we were children." As St. Aubin finished he ran out of the room, slamming the door to behind him with a loud bang. Halle sat and listened to his retreating footsteps. His gaze was fixed moodily on the floor. He shook his head tragically, as he gazed at one spot, unconscious almost of what he was doing. "Since we were children!" he said. "Since we were children!"

XXII.

As St. Aubin came toward the recess where the out-of-door meal was laid, he approached Madame with a solemn face and said in a low voice:

"I am glad that the Baroness and Mademoiselle are not down, Mamasha. Bob has been acting so strangely. If it goes on much longer, we shall have to put him under restraint, I fear." He turned to Quentin. "You know that those who are insane always give a reason other than the real one for their anger against a certain person or persons. Now, Halle is very much incensed against you. He says that it is because you stumbled upon his ridiculously secret manner of getting his automobile apparatus into the châlet, whereas the real reason is that he fancies himself in love with my wife, and he sees in every chance stranger a possible——"

"Oh, Bruno! Do not say such things! What will Mr. Quentin—" Alixe's voice died away, her face was suffused with crimson.

"What bad taste, Bruno!" said Madame. "How can you? Are you losing your judgment?"

Quentin raised an angry glance to this man who could take such an occasion to humiliate his wife.

"It is all true, Mamasha. He now imagines that Mr. Quentin is his rival and is plotting——"

"Poor Robert!" said Alixe, who had quickly regained her self-possession, "and poor Mr. Quentin, to be the subject of such ridiculous conversation. Should you not take him away, Bruno? I mean Robert, Mr. Quentin, not you," said Alixe, smiling and showing her white teeth, set in a point under her short upper lip; "take him to some expert, Bruno, some expert in Paris, and see if there is really anything the matter with his mind. Ah, Robert! Here you are! Come and sit by me. Coffee? Chocolate? Or will you let me make you a cup of real English tea?"

Halle looked the image of wretchedness. He glanced furtively at Lord Eldon, who was sheltered behind his newspaper deep in the latest news of the Dreyfus scandal.

"What is the dernier mot with regard to l'Affaire, Lord Eldon?" asked Madame.

Halle glanced at Quentin, but his eyes were fixed on Lord Eldon, as he listened to the want of testimony in l'Affaire. He glanced at St. Aubin, who had turned and was calling gayly to Valery as he flashed along the terrace: "Hulloa, you magnificent Rastaquouère! Where do you manage to get all your fine feathers?"

Gartha was hanging upon her father's arm, and the laughter of the child and the hearty answering shout of the gentleman, "From Africa, faith! It isn't so much the feathers, me jool, as the way in which you wear 'em," filled the morning air. Every one turned to watch the approach of this gorgeous person but the priest. He sank into a chair at the side of Alixe, his attitude spiritless and hopeless.

"You angel!" he murmured under his breath. "You dear angel. My saint! My saint!"

"Don't, Robert," she said, gravely, as she gave him a friendly clasp, which was quickly shortened, as he saw fit to press her hand too closely within his own. "You have been working too hard, Robert. We must have some excursions. They will be good for you all. I have been selfish. Gartha, would you like a picnic? Don't you remember our old picnics, Robert? We must think where to go, and decide upon the day, must not we, little Gartha?"

Quentin could hardly repress an exclamation of disgust as he saw her evident friendliness for the priest in whom he had concluded that all the cardinal sins had found refuge.

"You dear angel!" repeated Halle in a low tone. "Rather than give you one moment's unhappiness I would go away—" he broke off and bit his lip. A tear-drop fell upon the hand which held out his cup to him. Quentin, although he had withdrawn his eyes, looked again, he could not help it; he was puzzled at what he saw on the face of the priest, and at the wondering sadness in the eyes of Alixe. He heard nothing of what they were saying, but it seemed to him that she looked at her old playfellow with eyes of pity, because she heard in his words, whatever they might have been, but the ravings of an incipient madman.

"But there is no question of giving unhappiness, Robert," said Alixe gently. "I received the blow of my life some days ago—last week, was it not? I cannot remember. It seems ages ago that I heard that dreadful news. I wanted only a little time before I faced the world again. You are sorry for me, I know,

Robert. You would have prevented that sorrow coming into my life could you have done so, that I also know."

Halle leaned toward her and said under his breath, in agonized whispers:

"Oh, say that again, Alixe; say that again!"

"Yes, I will say it again if you wish, but that can change nothing, Robert. These matters are not the work of human agency;" her tone was low and solemn; "they are the acts of God. As such, we must accept them and not complain."

Halle leaned nearer. He looked up into her face, as an animal gazes upon a worshipped master.

"Alixe," he whispered eagerly, seemingly forgetful of every one but the woman before him, "Alixe, I have a great mind to tell you—to confess to you——"

"Bob!" It was St. Aubin's rasping voice, calling from the further end of the table. "What are you going into heroics about? You skeleton of religion, you ghostly sham-expounder of the faith of holy church! You are not handsome enough, Bobby, darling, with your hollow eyes, and your lank figure, to confess to the ladies. It takes a prelate like our friend the Archbishop to——"

Alixe broke hurriedly in upon St. Aubin's taunts.

"No, no, Robert," she said in a low tone, patting kindly the hand of her old friend. She felt that his mind, never very strong, must have been temporarily unhinged by his troubles, troubles which he fancied greater than they were. The Archbishop might warn them all against him, and she valued the Archbishop's opinion, no one's more; but he could not force her to desert her old playmate or to make her believe that

he had erred intentionally. "Come here, little Gartha," she called, "and tell me where you would like to go for our picnic." She smiled at the child, although her face seemed now to wear a settled mask of sadness. Gartha left her father and danced gayly up to Alixe. Quentin glanced at the priest. He sat looking at his untasted cup and gnawing his thin under lip.

XXIII.

QUENTIN did not see anything of Alixe for some days. After that one appearance at breakfast, she kept to her own room very closely. The only answer that Quentin got from any one, when he asked each day as to the state of her health, was that she had a slight cold. He wondered if anything more serious kept her away from the circle gathered under her roof, and whether her malady were physical or mental.

Meanwhile Madame, the ever-perennial, divided her attentions between Quentin and Lord Eldon, taking first one and then the other on exploring expeditions among the hills and valleys that surrounded the favored situation of l'Abbaye de Bref. Quentin saw Lord Eldon depart for his first drive with Madame with a subdued smile upon his lips. He had driven with her on the day previous, and the sauce for one goose seemed to be flavored in exactly the same manner and served up just as delicately as for the other. Quentin felt pretty sure that he knew just the sweet little starts and surprised exclamations to which Madame was treating Lord Eldon, and he wondered with a strange feeling somewhat akin to jealousy if the starts and exclamations were any sweeter or more frequent in the case of the one than of the other—the one being the British peer, the other himself.

Madame was an extremely attractive woman, of that there was not the very slightest doubt. She was in appearance much younger than her years. She wore

a high pleated lace close about her throat at the spot where age the soonest asserts itself. Upon her pretty blonde head she wore a dainty round hat with frills of white mousseline de soie, and, enveloping this, a voluminous white veil, upon which many bouquets of flowers and numerous vines and scriggles wandered, concealing any incipient wrinkle which might be growing more pronounced upon her fine skin. Her face was so concealed that, but for the occasional flash of her really handsome eyes and the tender pleading of her affectionate voice, one would hardly have recognized this feminine Jehu who sat so upright in the little phaeton and drove the spirited horses with the skill of an Englishwoman. One must not reckon without Madame's youthful figure. If not so tall as Alixe, she held herself straighter, perhaps, because of that, and when one looked for the initial time on what Miss Spencer had called "Mamasha's phenomenal back," one knew not whether the face which he would shortly behold would be that of a young girl or a face which had charmed its admirers for more than two-score years.

Both Quentin and Lord Eldon had been persuaded to extend the length of their visits. To Quentin the place and its surroundings were of a growing fascination, and every day found him more unwilling to leave them. Lord Eldon also seemed content to remain. So, with the exception of Valery, the house party had not changed since the exodus on the second day of Quentin's stay. Both men thought that they had solved the mystery of the nightly visitants. There was still a show of keeping up the knockings, but as they came now either directly underneath Quentin's room, or on his outer door, he felt quite sure that

they had been of the priest's designing, for since the door at the foot of the stairs had been locked, and Lord Eldon had hidden the key, no one knew where, the dressing room and the little closet had echoed no more to the fall of ghostly footsteps. The two men gave Halle the coldest nods of recognition when they met him. Sometimes this was not for a day or two. The man seemed to disappear. He was seldom at the table, and but for the occasional flutter of his black robe in the distance, or upon the chalet stair, he seemed to have vanished entirely from the life of the château.

It was on the second day after the withdrawal of Alixe to her own rooms that Madame had started out for her alternate flirtation with Lord Eldon. It mattered not so much to Madame (and this Quentin, with a lingering feeling of pride in her attentions to himself, was obliged to confess to his inmost soul) who was the object of her ephemeral devotion. The affection always sprang full-fledged from a breast where it was ever Spring. Her eyes always told the alternate that he and he alone was the chosen recipient of that affection.

St. Aubin had withdrawn to his own rooms, leaving Quentin to discuss the comparative merits of single stitch and cross stitch with the Baroness, who was engaged in making (so she informed Quentin) a reproduction of the Bayeux tapestry. After having admired, ad nauseam, the fiftieth sketch of the Abbey, done by Mademoiselle, which was perhaps less like it than any of its predecessors, he got up and strolled away, hardly knowing what to do with himself, until his fair-and-forty enslaver should return and deal out to him the remaining dregs of affection which she had not dribbled away upon the British peer.

XXIV.

As Quentin lounged along, cigar alight, hands in pockets, he found himself at the end of the terrace and at the top of a flight of steps which he had not seen before. He descended the steps and, as he walked, trying to reason out in his beclouded mind many a perplexing surmise, he heard a voice calling to him. It came from above his head. Quentin stopped and looked upward. Gartha was perched on the top of the wall under the shadow of a large tree which stood some distance back from the boundary of the domain, its sweeping branches, however, throwing a delightful shade across the child's position.

"Come up here, Mr. Quentin," called Gartha.

"How shall I get up there?" asked Quentin, nothing loath, but seeing no way to manage it. "How did you get there?"

"Easily enough," answered Gartha. "Go on a little way and you will find the escalier—stairs, I mean. It is so hard not to speak it, is it not, Mr. Quentin?"

Quentin laughed as he walked onward. In a moment he came to a small flight of stone steps, built against the inner side of the wall. They were so narrow that he was forced to plant one foot carefully before the other in ascending. Once or twice he was in danger of losing his balance, at which Gartha laughed aloud unfeelingly.

"I do not wish you to fall, Mr. Quentin; yet nom de Dieu! ça me ferait beaucoup de plaisir!" called the child. "Valery once tried to get up here, but his figure would not allow it. O! Voilà! O, mon Dieu! Ç'est épatant!" This because Quentin, in looking upward, had lost his balance, and was forced to spring to the ground.

"That's a very contradictory statement," said Quentin, smiling gayly up at her. "Now you may laugh as much as you please, I shall be up there in two minutes."

"Do you recognize this spot?" asked Gartha as he seated himself by her side on the tiled roof of the wall.

"Yes," answered Quentin, "I think so. Isn't this the very place where you and I first made acquaintance with each other?"

"Yes, it is the very spot, and there is a little porte—door, I mean—along there near the foot of the steps, where Alixe came in that night, when she was calling me, you know, after meeting with that horrid Father Halle."

"Then you don't like Father Halle."

"Ah, bah, non! I am on His Grace's side. I am a Catholic child, but if I was not, Mr. Quentin, don't you think any one would nat-nat-naturally love His Grace and hate Robert Halle?"

"Well," said Quentin, smiling down on the thin, eager face, "I don't know that I should love or hate either one. I shouldn't take enough interest. You use strong language for so small a girl."

Gartha plumed herself and raised her head like a young turkey.

"Yes, that is what they all say, I have very decided

con—con-victions. Then you don't like my dear Archbishop?"

"Oh, yes, I do! I like His Grace immensely, but as to loving him, I leave that to the ladies."

"Mamasha loves him, I am certain. I believe if he was not a sacerdotal she would marry him on the first occasion."

Quentin experienced that slight feeling of sinkage about the region of the heart which results to mortals when they discover that they alone have not uncontrolled possession of a certain well-spring of affection, fatal as such possession may be.

"You must not talk so about Madame Petrofsky," said Quentin loyally, in as severe a voice as he could muster, "or about the Archbishop either. Little girls should——"

"Oh, yes, I know, saw and not heard; but if I must not be saw or heard, I have saw and heard for my own self."

"How old are you?" asked Quentin.

"I'm nearly seven," said Gartha, pressing her lips together with a self-conscious air; "but, then, I'm extremely pre—pre—what is it I am, Mr. Quentin?"

"Precocious?" asked Quentin with becoming gravity.

"Yes; that is what Mr. le Maurier said. Did you ever see Mamasha hang on to His Emnunce's hand? The big one with the ring on it."

"I don't know any His Eminence," replied Quentin.

"Oh, yes, you do. It's the Archbishop; but I think he ought to be a cardinal, so I called him His Emnunce. One day when the Cardinal came to see us in Paris I called him Your Grace, and Mamasha sent me to bed for it. She never hung on to the Car-

dinal's hand. He is much too old for the vanities of this life, Marie Monrouge says; but I saw her go to kiss the Archbishop's hand one day, and she said, 'You dear!' And the queer thing was My Emnunce did not seem to be at all gêné about it. You see, the Cardinal is a person qu'on ne peut pas tromper."

"Where does this road lead to?" asked Quentin, indicating the highway which ran at the foot of the wall.

"I do not know. What do you think Robert Halle wanted with Alixe that night?"

Quentin put on his most severe expression. "Had your aunt wished us to know," he said, "she would have told us; as she did not——"

"It was only to give Robert the key to the west wing of the chalet. She told me so."

"And you are telling me; that is very wrong," said Quentin, secretly delighted that Alixe had made no mystery of her actions to the child.

"She said—I mean Alixe—that poor Robert had been hounded by the church, and had not where to lay his head. That's in the prayer-book, is it not, Mr. Quentin? And she said that if Uncle Bruno—how I hate my Uncle Bruno! She said that if Uncle Bruno were here he would give him a pied-à-terre until the trouble had blown over. When will the trouble blow over, Mr. Quentin?"

"How do I know, Gartha? Do you know that you are a very naughty little girl to repeat this to me? If your aunt wished me to know it, she——"

"I have not told it to any one else, and I know you will not," said Gartha. "What is it Ada Spencer says? Oh, yes! Give me away! She says that is pure American. What nice things one can say in American. I know very much of American, Mr.

Quentin. I know 'a perfect jay' and 'straight as a string.' Harry Ware taught me of those."

"And who is Harry Ware?" asked Quentin. "It seems to me that I hear of some new acquaintance of yours every day."

"Oh, he's another of Mamasha's. He said she had him straight as a string and he felt like thirty-nine cents. Did you ever feel like thirty-nine cents, Mr. Quentin? (Quelle est la monnaie de cuivre en Angleterre—I mean is the thirty-nine cents of that money of copper?)"

"No," said Quentin, "I don't think I ever did."

"When I asked Alixe what it meant, she said that he could not be of our set. When I asked Valery, he said he must be an outsider. When I asked Mademoiselle what it meant to feel like thirty-nine cents, she said it was a prix fixe. It was just like throwing off the louis, the franc, or the centime. The Weasel said she thought Harry Ware must be a commis voyageur. I asked Harry Ware if he was—a commis voyageur, I mean—and he gave me a blow of the eye, and said no, he did not think so. Valery said I was speaking the Greek to him. How could I speak the Greek to Harry Ware? I cannot speak the Greek to any one else. Valery said that if I had asked him if he was a bummer, no, I mean drummer, he would have understood me. Harry Ware was lovely! He had some sort of strange, flat boxes in his rooms, and one day when I was visiting him"—Quentin drew his breath at this astounding confession—"he opened one and gave me some lovely square bits of cloth. He gave them for my dolls."

"Stop a moment. Let me ask you how you came to be visiting Mr. Harry Ware?"

"Oh, mon Dieu! Do you not know that he had your apartments in the chalet? Alixe was in Paris. She scolded me well when she came back. Mamasha was walking with Monsieur le Maurier and——"

"Well, go on," said Quentin impatiently, "go on!"

"He told me many strange stories of his adventures. He said that once a man gave him a box full of chocolate. He called it a trunk. I thought that only elephants was possessed with trunks, Mr. Quentin; and he paid Harry Ware's expenses, the man that gave the chocolate did, to Mon Real." Gartha meant Montreal. "Where is Mon Real, Mr. Quentin?" Not waiting for a reply: "And he got hungry, Harry Ware did. He said food was scarce. How could food be scarce? I never knew of food that it was scarce, Mr. Quentin! And he ate up all the chocolate; and he said they had not seen him since. When he said that he laughed very loud and gave some coup of the foot, so, on the gravel, flat! He danced a few steps—oh, mon Dieu! He made me to laugh. He said it was the double-shuffler. What is a double-shuffler, Mr. Quentin? Can you dance one?"

"No," said Quentin, "I have never learned that accomplishment. You mean, I suppose, a double-shuffle."

"Yes," said Gartha, whose face had fallen at Quentin's declaration that he had never learned the double-shuffle.

"Well, no matter," she said in an encouraging tone. "Perhaps you can learn some day. Harry Ware could teach you—but no, I forgot, Harry Ware will never come back here again."

"Why not?" asked Quentin.

"Because I showed Mamasha a little échantillon

and told her what Mademoiselle and Valery had remarked, and she said"—here Gartha's body took on a swinging motion from her waist upward; she swayed from side to side; she pursed out her lips, and mouthed exaggeratedly, and repeated in a sing-song tone, which kept time to the nodding of her head: "'*That* is the *last* of *Henery Ware!*' That's what Mamasha said, 'That is the last of Henery Ware!' She was of a rougeur, Mamasha! Valery said it was tragic. What is tragic, Mr. Quentin? Mamasha was very fond of that jeune homme, and Harry Ware was very fond of her until Alixe came along; she always does, you know."

"Always does what?" asked Quentin.

"Come along. When I'm big, I'm going to wear my hair all pulled over my ears with silver combs and look at the men without seeing them, and take them all away from Mamasha. I shall try. Valery says Alixe doesn't try. Valery says they just flock. I wonder if they will flock when I'm big. There was one very queer thing about Harry Ware. He called Charles Monsieur; Misshure! so! Valery said that was because he was a outsider. What is a outsider, Mr. Quentin? He said, I mean Harry Ware, that my Uncle Bruno was probably the worse thing that ever happened. I don't know exactly what Harry Ware meant, Mr. Quentin; but you know how I hate my Uncle Bruno, and it seemed to me as if I thought as he did."

"Where did this refined young gentleman live when he was at home?" asked Quentin.

"I don't know; but I know he said that at his place they had a long fall and a late freeze-up. What is a fall, Mr. Quentin?"

"He meant autumn," said Quentin. "I say that, too. We always say it in America."

"Are you an American?" asked Gartha, with a dawning look of horror in her eyes.

"Yes. What of it?"

"Why—why—I thought they were all the very dreadfulest people. Quelquechose abominable! When once I asked Marie Monrouge why Americans acted so, she just said, 'Ç'est la race!' Harry Ware showed me a ring Mamasha gave him. It was——"

"I am not interested in Mr. Ware's——"

"A twisted sort of chain, with dark blue stones in it."

(So that was the reason why Madame's pretty finger was unadorned with the sapphire ring that she had slipped off his finger in playful mood on the sands one bright day and had forgotten to return.)

"I asked Harry Ware to give it to me, but he said he would have hocked it long ago, but that the old girl would raise Hail Columbia. What is it to hock——"

"Had you any idea whom he meant by 'the old girl'?" asked Quentin drily.

"Valery said it was sa faute. He said she had no discrim—oh, well—well—n—no—well, yes, a little," thus stammering, as Quentin fixed her with his eye, where she saw disapproval. She changed the subject hurriedly. "And then Monsieur le Maurier came. I do not know where Mamasha got him. Valery said at Treport. He said he thought Mamasha was a little ashamed of him before you. You know who I mean, Mr. Quentin, the one Lord Eldon said about, 'The third Napoleon, by Jove!' I do not like that Monsieur le Maurier. Je suis bien faché

contre Monsieur le Maurier. He eats of cheese with the fork."

"Do you always have as excellent reasons for your likes and dislikes of people?"

Gartha nodded. Gartha's words had recalled to Quentin's mind the little gentleman with the waxed moustache and the Roman nose, whom he had at once thought the very counterpart of the Third Napoleon.

"Don't you remember? That was the evening that Alixe wore her diamonds and Monsieur le Maurier exclaimed, 'Mon Dieu! Madame la Duchesse a les manières et la taille d'une Imperatrice!' When I told Mamasha, she sent me to bed. I usually have to me coucher, depart for my bed—I mean, for those others—them remarks. Then, the next morning he came when I was alone in the ruins, and how he did put to me the question."

"Put questions to you! What about?"

"Oh, nom de Dieu! I know not exactly. I remember that he asked me about you——"

"About me?" returned Quentin in astonishment.

Gartha nodded. "He said, 'Were you very intimate with my Uncle Bruno, and did you help him with his chemicals?' And I said, 'God forbid!'"

"There was no necessity for such extravagant denial as that. You might just have said——"

"I wanted him to understand once and for all the days that you were no friend of my Uncle Bruno. You know how I hate my Uncle Bruno. Why, even Alixe knows all about it. Then he asked me about Robert Halle; more about him than any one. I made out as bad a case against Robert Halle as I could."

"What case could you make out against Father

Halle?" asked Quentin, laughing in spite of himself. "I am sure he has always been very good to you."

"Oh, oui, très poli, but I do not like his ways," answered Gartha. "I told Monsieur le Maurier that he had strange men coming to see him, men who are not of our condition, gens de la basse classe; that once I viewed him behind the mill talking with a very bad looking person and taking a parcel of him."

"That is nothing against him," argued Quentin. "Many people look bad who are not bad."

"Monsieur le Maurier gave me a box of sweets and promised more when he came again. Candied fruits of Potin. Yes, he is but an épicier, that I know; but those are the things that I like best of tout Paris. And when he left, he beckoned to me this way, 'Come here! Come here!'" Gartha crooked her little brown finger and beckoned to her imaginary double. "And he said, 'Now all of us two——'"

"We two——"

"We two have a secret together. Be sure you find out all that the priest does, and do not tell any one but me, Jean le Maurier."

"And this is how you keep your promise," Quentin laughed again. "Don't be afraid, I will not tell; but I think it a very strange thing that a gentleman should come here ostensibly to visit your—ahem!—to visit Madame, and ask you to spy upon her friends. Did you tell her?"

"No, but I told Valery, and he said Mr. Le Maurier was probly a emissry of the Archbishop."

"So your father knows?"

"Yes, and Alixe. And Alixe said to Mamasha that Monsieur le Maurier should never come to the Abbey again, and Mamasha said that Alixe was jealous with

her. Just as if Alixe could not get them with the crook of her little finger. That is what Valery said."

"So that is the way you keep people's secrets! I must be careful how I trust you." Gartha's lip drooped, which, Quentin seeing, did his best to reassure her by a kinder tone. "And what did Madame say to all this?"

"Who? Mamasha? Oh, she did not care so much as we have thought. You see by that time Alixe had come along, and Monsieur le Maurier had forgotten all about Mamasha. He came just after Mamasha said, 'That is the last of Henry Ware.' Do not let her know I told you, Mr. Quentin! I do get so many scoldings." The child sighed. "But I am glad Robert Halle has gone. I do hate him with his long dress and snaky eyes."

"Gone?" said Quentin.

"I have not seen him since before yesterday," said Gartha.

"Don't you want to go for a walk with me? Come! Let us go for a little run up the hill."

Gartha immediately arose, saying, "Yes, and I'll show you where my squirrels are, a tree just the other side of the glade. Tout près, tout près! Ah, bah! that French again!" She began to descend the narrow little steps. "Do you know where the Weasel is, Mr. Quentin?"

"I didn't know you had a weasel," said Quentin, as he sprang down from the top of the wall. "You see that I got down the quickest after all! What a narrow little staircase!"

"Marie Monrouge says that a Religious made that stair. She got out and builded it in a single night, all to go off with a nobleman, a marquis who was in

love of her." Quentin raised his eyes to the stairway.

"I don't think she could have laid those stones," he said. "Certainly not in a single night."

"And the idea of leaving the warm bed and stealing out to build a wall to go away with a nobleman. Noblemen are dreadful vauriens. I never saw any noblemen but my Uncle Bruno, and Alixe's duke, and I never saw him."

"Lord Eldon," suggested Quentin.

"Yes, and the Lord Eldon. Valery says the higher the title the deeper the game. He says that you can never reckon without your hostess at Abbaye de Bref. What is it to reckon without your hostess, Mr. Quentin?"

"I don't think I ever heard exactly that expression, Gartha."

"Si je ne me trompe. I would not hesitate to build a stairway to escape with you," said Gartha, looking up frankly into Quentin's eyes and squeezing his hand with her grimy one, "and I'm sure I would be more than willing to escape with his Emnunce. You know, the Archbishop. So far I think you two have been my only lovers."

Gartha said these words with a very lofty air. She added: "When I told Valery, he laughed till he was very red. Oh! of a rougeur, and he said that I could not expect to rival Mamasha at my age, that she was much younger than I was in every way, and that she had done for you both. What had she done for you both?"

Quentin did not appear to hear this very pointed question. He was gazing at the far distant hills. They were now at the little door in the wall. Not

wishing to reply he pretended to busy himself with the hasp of the gate.

Gartha went to a crevice in the wall and took therefrom a key. "You must lock it on the outside," she said. Then she stood uncertain, just within the doorway. "You didn't tell me where the Weasel is, Mr. Quentin."

"The weasel? I didn't know you had a weasel. Where do you keep him?"

"The Weasel," said Gartha, speaking very slowly, and with extreme emphasis, "was sitting on the terrace an hour ago. Elle est caractérisée de la manière suivante. She has a grey moustache and eyes of the ferret. She does not wear garters, and her stockings is always fallen down. She has a tooth fastened on a peg, and spits when she talks, she makes very poor daubs, Valery says, and her first name is Mademoiselle."

Quentin turned his back again and looked up the hill.

"Les petites San Gène have an English miss. I wish that I, too, could have an English miss. Mamasha says that Mademoiselles are the meilleur marché, but why should I have the education of the meilleur marché when Valery has so much African money? An English miss will cost the more, but she will remain an English miss."

"I should think it extremely likely," said Quentin.

"And where was Mademoiselle?"

"Mademoiselle," he said, in as steady a voice as he could command, "is sitting on the terrace with the Baroness. She has been very busy painting."

"Oh, yes! Do I not know? She is making the

dry wash. Valery says that it is the only wash of which she knows something."

"I don't believe she will miss you for a little while," said Quentin. "Come, now. Let us see who will be at the top of the hill first."

"Has you ever seen the Weasel's garters, Mr. Quentin?"

"No," said Quentin, shortly.

"If you watch her ankles you will see them. They are always down. Valery says that if you——" Quentin hurriedly locked the door, slipping the key into his pocket.

"Here I go, catch me if you can," and off he ran, putting a stop to he knew not what disclosures. He was followed by Gartha, who, bonnetless, her elf-locks hanging down over her shoulders, had, at his words, started on a quick run toward, then up, the wooded slope. Once fairly on the way Quentin lagged behind. When Gartha became tired, she turned to see him, lying, apparently exhausted, beneath one of the trees which grew on the hillside. When the child was rested, and started on again, her big companion raised his long form from the ground and strode slowly after her, dragging his feet as if this steep climb was more than he had bargained for.

"You'll get there before me, Gartha," he called after her.

Gartha had reached the crest of the hill. She was standing still at the root of a tree, her manner one of secrecy and intense excitement.

"H-u-u-sh," she whispered. Then she beckoned violently, at the same time sending another low "Hush!" down the hill.

Quentin, to humor her, advanced with a great show

of caution. When he reached the place where she had halted, she, from her eminence on a protruding root, laid her arms upon his shoulders and whispered in his ear:

"There's a little nest of squirrels over there on the other side of the glade—p'tit, p'tit, p'tit! More of interest than les cochons de lait. The little pigs of milk, you know. If we tiptoe, we may see them."

So Quentin tiptoed as in duty bound, and soon the two were in the open circle, and walking as noiselessly as possible toward the further slope which stretched downward into another valley. Gartha held Quentin by the hand.

"C'est là-bas, just where you see that hole énorme—enormous," corrected Gartha, halting and pointing to the base of an old tree a short distance down the hill. Then again she began to creep along on the tips of her toes, and Quentin followed in much the same manner. As they came out from behind a gigantic oak upon the steep brow of the hill, they perceived, just below them, not the squirrels, little or big, but two men, who had their backs toward this pair of friends. As Quentin came within earshot, he heard one of them say:

"That last clock-work was defective, very! The count does not know why, but he is not at all satisfied with it. He has not heard that it has done what he expected."

The speaker had his back to the pair. He was dressed in a long black coat which reached to his heels, and he wore a black felt hat. The second man, who was standing looking up the hill, and facing Quentin, was dressed in the garb of a workman.

He returned a quick answer; his manner was rough, and the tone verged on impertinence:

"The Monsieur knows that I must get paid for my work. That last bit took me all of three days to put together. If Monsieur le Comte does not know how to put it together, that is not my fault. If Monsieur le Comte would employ me regularly at the château, I could have done the matter more satisfactorily. With all Monsieur le Comte's money I should have had an automobile finished long ago. It seems to one who understands it that it takes a long time for these Messieurs to get one machine finished."

"Be silent," said the priest, raising his voice. "Here is your money. You will have to be more particular about the next bit, or you will get no more orders." The black sleeve was outheld and some notes passed from one hand to the other. Gartha, who was still watching for her squirrels, finger on lip, paying little attention to the men, stepped, for all her intended caution, on a dry stick. It cracked with loud warning. The black-coated man turned suddenly and disclosed to view the angry face of Father Halle.

"Gartha!" he exclaimed in a violent tone, "what are you spying on me for?"

"There! They've gone into their hole, Mr. Quentin. Why could not you keep still, Robert Halle? Valery says that you have always been a spoil-sport. Why cannot you be sage—good, I mean, just for once, and let me show to Mr. Quentin my squirrels?"

"You are teaching the child to become as deceitful as the rest of you," said the priest, looking upward at Quentin, his eyes ablaze with anger. "And so you, too, are spying on me again?"

"I am sure that if you recall the frankness of Gartha's speech you cannot accuse her of being deceitful toward you," said Quentin in answer, "and as for me, no one was further from my thoughts. Why you should be ashamed of being found in such close communication with such a very disreputable looking gentleman, I am at a loss to imagine. His looks show him to be as crafty as you are yourself. And the way in which he is stuffing your latest bribe into his pocket proves plainly that you have something to hide, both of you." Quentin spoke these words sharply. He spoke at a venture. He had no positive knowledge or even suspicion that anything was wrong with regard to Halle's meeting with the mechanic, who, in fact, had an honest enough face, but he had grown tired of the insolence of this priest. The sudden extreme pallor that overspread Halle's face proved that the shot had told. He stood there irresolute, looking first at Quentin and then at the workman.

"Do you understand what this gentleman is saying?" he asked. "He accuses me of giving you a bribe, and you of taking one. It is not within my priestly office to chastise him, but I will pay you twice as large a sum to-morrow as I have just handed you if you will pitch him down the hill yonder."

The workman, a brawny fellow, short and thickset, glanced from Quentin to the priest in astonishment. He could understand nothing of the antagonism displayed on both sides.

Quentin burst into a laugh. There was a sneer in it which he made as pronounced as possible. "Let him try it. Let him try it," he said. "How many

human beings your bribes have injured, Mr. Halle, I am at a loss to conjecture; but if you imagine that I am to be the next victim, you have reckoned without your host."

At these random words, Halle, to Quentin's astonishment, turned on him fairly beside himself with fury. He trembled in every limb. "Seize him!" he shouted. "Seize him! I say. This liar, this perjurer, this defamer of men a thousand times more honest than himself."

Quentin burst into an enraging laugh. He was, suddenly, so incensed against the priest that it was with difficulty that he restrained himself.

"So the cap fits!" he said. "It is strange with what alacrity you put it on, Mr. Halle." The workman stood wavering.

"Come on!" said Quentin, in a voice in which he strove in vain to preserve a quiet tone. "Come on! They won't recognize you when I have finished with you, and then I will send this precious son of the church to bear you company."

"Do you hear him, Guérin? Do you hear him?" screamed the priest, foaming at the mouth in his rage. "Will you allow a priest of the church to stand here and take the insults of this foreigner? You that I saw once fell an ox, and with one blow! What are you afraid of? At him! At the heretic! No matter what happens, I will absolve you."

Quentin leaned against a tree. "So you will absolve even the crime of murder, should it go so far," he said.

"Why don't you give him the coup yourself, Robert Halle?" called Gartha. "There are two of you. I have heard His Grace to say that you belong to our

church no longer. You may strike, now that you are not more a priest in holy orders."

Halle took a step forward toward the child, but Quentin fearing what he might be tempted to do in his unreasoning rage, thrust Gartha behind the tree.

"Back, back!" he said threateningly to Halle. "Men do not war on little children, even if they be dishonored priests."

By this time Halle's subordinate, seeing some sort of show of courage on the part of the priest, had thrown his coat to the ground, and was advancing with threatening eye, upward over the few feet of ground which separated himself and Quentin.

"Come on!" called Quentin, bristling for a fight. Not knowing what hidden strength the man might possess, "Run back," he called to Gartha, "and stand on the further edge of the glade, and when they have killed me between them, run down and tell them at the Abbey. Here! wait a minute. You will need the key." He tossed it to her, laughingly, and Gartha, who had been growing round-eyed and pale, joined him in his laugh.

"Robert Halle," called Gartha, as she backed slowly across the green circle, "if you know what is good for you, run! Run, as if His Grace was after you!"

Newly stung by this taunt, Halle made a quick dart toward Quentin and tried to grapple with him. Quentin allowed him to come close, and then with a grip that is well known to wrestlers he seized upon the priest, and with a dexterous movement swung the lank figure over his head. The priest fell heavily to the ground and lay there quite still. Guérin seeing his chief fallen, lying quite motionless, stole sneak-

ingly to the place where his coat was lying, picked it up and ran quickly down the slope. Gartha began to walk away without even so much as a look at her prostrate foe.

"You've killed Robert Halle," she called over her shoulder to Quentin. "Je m'en bats l'œil."

"He is not killed," said Quentin, and remembering the look that had come over Halle's face but a moment since at some random words of his, he added: "Before he dies, he will have the opportunity to think of those whom he has sent before him."

The eyelids of the priest trembled. He straightened his body, then sat up. He felt of one arm, then of the other, then of each leg, his knees, his ankles.

"Espèce de type!" ejaculated Gartha, looking scornfully at the priest.

"Gartha!

"Marie Monrouge says it! She says all—tout le monde says it in the quartier," and then, looking again at the priest, "espèce de sale Français!"

"Nothing of the kind that you can say harms the priest," said Quentin dryly.

"I suppose that you would say that it does me the harm. Au contraire, Monsieur Quentin, it does me much of the good."

"Very well, come away!"

"There is nothing broken," said Quentin. "I had no intention of killing you, but be careful, please, how you attack me in the future. I shall not let you off so easily the next time. Come, Gartha."

The priest raised himself and stood upright. He turned toward Quentin. His eyes glared. They shone like balls of fire. He stretched forth his hand toward the two, and then began to pour from his lips

a string of curses more frightful than any to which Quentin had ever listened.

"Cease!" Quentin shouted! "You shall not utter such vile words before this child. Were your anathema delivered from the high altar it would not affect me, for I should still consider its source, but this child is of the church which you pollute, and I will not allow you to foul her ears with language which is fit only for the slums. If you have forgotten what is due to your once upright manhood, you shall remember that which is due to the daughter of the house where you have been for many years a pensioner."

"Yes," said Gartha, nodding her head commendingly, and speaking very fast, with much appearance of consciousness, "and I will tell Alixe that you raved and swored and hurled curses and said sacré, and lots of other bad words. It mortifies me very much, Robert Halle, to see you very rude before the gentleman that I am to marry some day."

"Little fool!" snarled the priest. "So he flatters you that way, does he?"

"And if you are an unfrocked priest," said Gartha, holding tightly to Quentin's hand and backing off the while as she watched Halle warily, "why do you not take off that long 'black' woman's costume and show your legs like other of the men? That coat covers up the behind part of you, but in front you are still playing priest." After Gartha had made the sarcastic inquiry and appended statement, she ran, pulling Quentin after her. "Now," she said, "I am going to the Abbey to tell Alixe."

At the name of Alixe, repeated in a cooler moment, Halle shivered, turned away, and descended the hill, following the path which the mechanic had taken.

Quentin and Gartha watched him for a moment, then crossed the glade and skirted the slope which led toward the Abbey.

"Now, Gartha," said Quentin, "don't say anything about all this. It will only annoy your aunt, and she seems to have enough to trouble her just now. If you can prevent her having any more, I think you will."

"Well," returned Gartha, "I go to think over that. If Alixe does not come between me and you——"

"You and me."

"—You and me," repeated Gartha obediently. "I cannot see why you want me to put you at the first, I may— You were my discovery. Now was you not——"

"Were you not?"

"Were you not, Mr. Quentin?"

"Or were you mine, which?"

"And if Bruno wants to pay a man some money, why must Robert Halle meet him, that ouvrier, over there in that lonely place, to pay him? And why did he think we were spying upon him? Seigneur Dieu! I was never so disappointed. Espèce de type!"

"Don't say that, Gartha."

"Marie Monrouge says it and la Mère Monrouge also. Do you know la Mère Monrouge, Mr. Quentin, and le Père Monrouge? He was living in an atelier in the Quartier Latin when he was young. The Mère Monrouge, she gives me the gateaux."

As Gartha chattered, her talk half heard by Quentin and receiving random answers, his thoughts were much like those expressed so plainly by the child herself. He was at a loss to understand the secrecy preserved by Halle and his master—for that St. Aubin was so, was quite evident to him now. As

Quentin walked he pondered. There seemed to be a profound mystery pertaining to the putting together of all their machinery. In the first place they called them chemicals, the materials with which they worked, and their conversation was constantly of automobiles. If St. Aubin was engaged in the invention of an automobile, why should he be so mysterious about receiving the various parts of the apparatus? Why should he pay his workman in this underhand manner? Why should not the different bits of motive power come to the château openly? They might be enclosed in boxes which could be opened in St. Aubin's own chambers, the east rooms of the chalet. And if a workman had completed a portion of the machinery, why should he not be paid by a draft or note at the château itself? All this appearance of secrecy had set Quentin thinking deeply, and caused him to feel that there must be some occult knowledge which St. Aubin was determined should be kept from all but his tool, the priest. He reasoned and argued for and against in his mind, and finally found that the only conclusion on which he could decide definitely was that the whole thing was a pretence on St. Aubin's part. He was simply wasting his wife's fortune in riotous living in Paris, and his long absences meant that, no more, no less. So long as he could pretend to be at work on some wonderful invention, the money, and plenty of it, would be forthcoming; but should Alixe discover that which Quentin felt certain must be the fact, she would cease the lavish and generous expenditure which was, he had heard, beginning to tell upon her income.

As Quentin came to this conclusion, he had reached the road at the bottom of the hill. Gartha handed

him the key, for they were now standing before the little door in the wall.

"There is just one thing I wish to ask you, Mr. Quentin, before we part," said Gartha, looking up from her lowly height. He, in turn, looked down inquiringly. "Would you mind telling me your name, your first name?"

"Telling you my first name? No, certainly not. It's John."

Gartha's face fell. "Oh!" she said, "John!" There was silence for a moment, or as long as Gartha would allow it to remain unbroken. Quentin unlocked the door in the wall and entered, Gartha following. He then closed and locked the door, giving the key to the child, and pushed the bolt in place, thus doubly securing this way of ingress; and then Quentin, who had been conscious of a discontented murmur, heard her say: "Why can you not? Do you not hear me, Mr. Quentin? Why can you not?"

"Why can't I what, Gartha?"

"Ah, nom de Dieu! It is to repeat again! Why, be rechristened, I am asking you. You might let my Emnunce do it. He did it to the Countess Blandina's twins." Gartha spoke as if she were advising vaccination. "I wish—I wish, Mr. Quentin, it was another name than John. How would you like Alphonse, or Anatole? I once heard Mamasha say there was not much sentiment about the name of John."

"She is right!" assented Quentin promptly. "There isn't."

"It was once when she had a letter from England, a little while before you came. Mamasha read that letter, and she folded it, and began to put it in her

dress up here, so; and then she thought better things of that, and she opened her little black bag, and put it in the bag. Mamasha looked sad—I was almost unhappy for her. She looked away; over there."

"To the hills?" asked Quentin.

"No, no; much, much further, as if she was looking the whole globe round; and then she sighed, like this." Gartha gave a heart-rending sigh. "And she said, Mamasha did: 'There is not much sentiment about the name of John.'"

By this time Gartha had replaced the key in the crevice in the wall, and was skipping along by Quentin, holding his hand fast in hers.

"You might be named Anastasius, after His Grace; or Patrick Michael, after my Grandfather Valery." The two friends ascended the stone steps at the end of the terrace and passed under the chalet windows. Had one been looking out from the chalet or the château they might have seen this strange pair stop underneath the great tree, and, had they watched closely, they would have seen something pass from the hand of Quentin to that of his little charge.

"There! That's settled," said Gartha, looking round to see who might be listening. "The Weasel's gone, Mr. Quentin," she added, as if she were explaining the habits of a denizen of a zoological garden.

There was a ring at the gate. Pierre Monrouge opened it at the summons, and Madame entered with Lord Eldon. Madame looked happy; one might say, with more truth, successful. Lord Eldon's face was flushed more than usual, his eyes were shining.

"Or you might be named Valery, after my father," said Gartha, resuming her first subject rather abruptly. She held Quentin's hands with both of hers,

and jumped up and down. "Hilary Valery, that would be a lovely name for you."

"Or Alibone Crackibone," supplemented Madame, who had come up to them just in time. "Have you had a pleasant afternoon, my friend?" She came close to Quentin, pushing Gartha ever so slightly aside as she did so, and looked up at him from under the fall of dentelle de soie, her eyes flashing through the snaky embroidery depicted upon the veil.

"I have missed you," said Quentin, looking down at her, then turning to gaze with a jealous stare after Lord Eldon's back.

"You dear!" said Madame. As a far door closed upon the rejuvenated Lord Eldon, she took Quentin's hand affectionately in hers. "You dear!" she repeated. Gartha walked away, hunching up her shoulders one after the other and shaking her skirts from side to side with great evidence of anger and consciousness.

XXV.

Alixe sat at her farther window, gazing abroad on the distant view. Her hands were lying listlessly in her lap, as she looked beyond the abbey wall and across the meadows where the sunny river tinkled through the valley, her eyes fixed upon the everlasting hills. Her head was listlessly down-drooped, her lashes were wet. There was a knock at the door.

"I cannot see any one," called Alixe.

"What, not me? Not your own Gartha? Tu me trompes, Alixe. Oh, dearest, mon ame, petit chou! Ouvrez-moi ta porte. I have something—oh! but of importance of the greatest. It is a secret just yet between all the two of us—me and you." As Gartha said these words, she pounded with her little fist on the door of the Abbess's room.

Alixe arose at once. She brushed her handkerchief across her eyes, went to the door, and opened it. Gartha was inside in a moment, and Alixe closed the iron barrier with a necessary clang, and put up the heavy worn chain.

"Dear little Gartha! Dear little girl! I have been longing to see you. Where have you been that you did not come to see Alixe?" She stooped and placed her arms around the bony little shoulders. They seemed to shrink to nothing at her touch. She kissed the child, and rising, led her to the open window. "Where have you been?" she repeated, as she seated herself and took Gartha up on her lap.

"I have been taking a promenade à deux up in the hills, with my latest and truly lover, Alixe," said Gartha seriously, turning and looking her straight in the eyes—of the pair, one could not have told whose gaze was the most straightforward and childlike. "I want you to promise me something. Will you?" And then, without waiting for reply and talking very fast, fingering the laces about Alixe's shoulders the while, "I want you to promise me never to come between me and John?"

"John? John who?" asked Alixe, a smile flooding her face at the airs of this comical child.

"Quentin, John Quentin. Did you not know that was his nom de baptême? What is the matter? Have I hurt you, Alixe? That would touch me with compunction. How you started! We are fiancés, me and John Quentin. My first love was my Emnunce, but Valery has—has—déconcerté me much. He says that his bride is the church—my Emnunce, I mean. Do you think the next best one is John Quentin? How you jump, Alixe! What is the matter? Are there pins in my frock? They will give one almost a blessure mortelle. Marie Monrouge said once there was une grande Princesse, and there was a pin in her little girl's dress, and it had the poison upon it, and it gave her a coup and killed her."

"There are other stings than pins, Gartha. What do you say Mr. Quentin's name is?"

"John."

"Who told you?"

"He did. I asked him. Of course I could not marry with a man if I did not know his name. Suppose we were at the wedding, you and John Quentin, and me and Valery and the Archbishop, and I should

begin to say, 'I, Gartha Valery, take you'—and then I should have to give him an oeillade, quick, like this, and say in a whisper, 'What did you say your name is, young man?' That would be of an awkwardness most extreme."

"Yes, it would be very trying," assented Alixe. "Well, and what more?"

"Well, then, after he told me, my face fell."

"Did it?" said Alixe, laughing. "How do you know that?"

"Faces always fall in the stories Mademoiselle reads to me; and I said, 'I should like you to be—re—bapt'—what shall I say, Alixe?"

"Rechristened, I suppose you mean."

"Yes, rechristened, after his Emnunce, Anastasius."

"His Grace, you mean."

"His Grace and my Emnunce," laughed Gartha. "As I was coming up the stairs, Alixe, I thought of something else. You see, we might have children. I should prefer three girls and three boys. Then they could be named Emnunce, Anastasius, and Hilary; and the girls could be named Alixe, Gartha, and Allaire, after my little mamma."

"You must not talk so freely, Gartha. It is not customary. I hope you never will to Mr. Quentin or any one else." Alixe looked grave. "You must never, never do it."

"I have not had the time,"answered Gartha. "I have only been fiancée about seven minutes. I do not really know whether John Quentin re—relizes it yet." Here Gartha changed her position to one that was most uncomfortable, her elbow resting on one knee, which was drawn up to meet it, her thumb hold-

ing up her chin, her forefinger resting prominently on her little brown cheek. A very large ring, which held a finely cut topaz, wobbled about on the thin brown member. At last she sighed in despairing tones:

"You don't seem to notice anything, Alixe."

"Notice what?"

"Oh! oh! Do turn your head this way. Don't look off the other side of the world. My ring! My ring! You do not see it at all."

"Your ring? Oh, yes; I do see it now. What a very beautiful stone that is, Gartha. Be very careful of it. That is a very handsome ornament; you might lose it."

"John Quentin did not surround me with con—condishuns," said Gartha proudly. "When I asked him for a gage d'amour, he said this was the only one he had, and it belonged to an aunt who was dead. Would she be my aunt too, Alixe, when we are married with each other? He never said another thing, or spoke of my losing it. He just trusted me, John Quentin did. And he told me another time of a sister of his who died. He said she was very beautiful, and that he loved her better than anything in the world; and when I asked him if she was more beautiful than you, he said, 'No.' How hot your face is, Alixe. Am I making you too warm? Shall I get down, Alixe? No? Then let me lay my head down on you, so. I am tired. We took a long prom—walk up in the hills, me and John Quentin. We went to look for those weeny squirrels. We went into the glade and a most sickening sight we saw. Quelque-chose abominable!"

"What did you see?"

"Instead of pretty squirrels, all of innocence, all of beauty, we saw a very much more hateful thing, and that was Robert Halle. I do hate him dans les derniers replis du cœur."

"Gartha, Gartha! Do not say such things. Robert Halle here again! Then your Uncle Bruno must be here too."

"For me, I hope that does not follow," returned Gartha, frankly. "That is what Valery ermarked when I said that one day. You should have saw——"

"Seen."

"Seen John Quentin throw Robert Halle over his head."

"Throw Robert Halle over his head! Oh, Gartha, what can you mean!" Alixe started to rise. "Why should he——"

"I mean that," said Gartha. "It was a fine sight. Attendez! Let me get down and show you." Gartha struggled to the floor. "You see we were looking for squirrels. I was here and John Quentin was there, where the prie-dieu stands. I beckoned him so, and said 'Hush,' and he came tip-toeing along just this way," Gartha suited her actions to her words, "and when we got to the old oak, who should we see instead of the squirrels but Robert Halle. He was handing some money to an ouvrier. Ah, bah! that French! to a working homme—man—and when he saw us he turned with an angry glance with much of the accès de colère, and said, 'What are you spying on me for, Gartha?' That made me much ashamed, Alixe. It was not very nice to a fiancée, now was it, Alixe?"

"No," assented Alixe, who, accustomed as she was to Gartha's quaint mixing of the languages, and her

mistakes between the two grammars, always found the child's conversation freshly amusing.

"Ecoutez! It is too long to tell, but the two men came up the hill to fight John Quentin, at least Robert Halle came, and the ouvrier started away, and when Robert Halle arroached John Quentin, he took him in his arms just as a mother takes its babe, and throwed him over his head."

"Oh! Oh!" Alixe started up, concern written in her face. "It could not be as a mother takes her babe, Gartha. Did Mr. Quentin hurt Father Halle?"

"J'espère," said Gartha in a cheerful tone. "He did get up, but possibly some bones are broken, though John Quentin said not. He walked down the hill, and then I taunted him. Then we walked off down our side of the hill, my little hand in John Quentin's, and Robert Halle went on his way, after the ouvrier."

"Oh, Gartha, how could you taunt him, poor man! What had he done to this—this Mr. Quentin?"

"I made some slight ermark about his being an unfrocked priest, and still wearing a long, black dress, and he went on his path muttering. I should not wonder if he had murder in his heart. May I play with your bracelet, Alixe?" Gartha climbed into the lap of her devoted Alixe. "Why do you wear so broad a bracelet? There! I have unclasped it. Oh! Oh! Why! How did you get that blue mark round your wrist? How ugly it looks, Alixe! Is that the clasp of the Mother Abbess who walks at night and takes your wrist in her hand, and says—" Gartha lowered her voice sepulchrally and looked over her shoulder with frightened eyes, "'Come—with —me——'"

"Who tells you those tales, Gartha? I will not have it. I have said so many a time."

"Only old Mère Monrouge down at the mill. You cannot turn her out. Valery says she is a fixture, fixée. He says she remains avec une fixité remarquable! He says she has not change her po—position for three hundred years." Gartha looked down on the purple mark again. She pressed her lips to the wrist of Alixe. "Dear Alixe," she said, "tell me how you got it, that mark. It appears as if some one pinched you."

"It was one of Uncle Bruno's experiments," said Alixe, then laughed a sad little laugh at her own conceit.

"Did he blow you up again, Alixe?" asked Gartha breathlessly.

"Yes," answered Alixe, sadly amused at this play upon words, and the situation.

"And it was sus—suc—you know what I mean, un succès?"

"No, dear, I do not think it was, this time. I think I have finished now—helping Uncle Bruno with his experiments."

"Ah, bah! How I hate my Uncle Bruno! I never could understan', Alixe, how you fell so dreadful in love of him to marry him. Now, John Quentin is a fine man in every respec', but you are too late for him, Alixe. Are you coming down to-night? Oh, do, dearest Alixe. It is so tiresome with only Mamasha and Mamasha's latest. John Quentin has to turn his attention to the Weasel, and she rewards him by spitting in his face."

"Gartha! Gartha! You must not say such dreadful things! They are really too bad."

"So Mademoiselle ermarked when I ermonstrated with her, but I said, 'I am only telling you for your own good.'" Gartha's tone and accent were so exactly like Mademoiselle's own, when she corrected the child, that Alixe laughed in spite of her wish not to encourage Gartha.

"Now, I must hurry, il faut que je parte! John Quentin will wonder what detains me. I shall wear the pink-ruffled if Marie Monrouge has pressed it. If not, then the blue and white that Lord Eldon called 'a dainty little robe.'"

When Gartha was gone, Alixe walked slowly about the room. She had decided, for Gartha's sake, to change her gown and appear at dinner. She rang the bell for Nanette, and then she went across the room to her wardrobe. In crossing the great space her trailing robe rolled some article along with it. It made a noise upon the tiled floor. Alixe ceased her walk and stooped down. Just upon the edge of the rug, caught among the fringe, to which it had been drawn by her skirt, lay the topaz ring which Gartha had dropped.

XXVI.

The picnic passed off more quietly than most picnics do. Usually there is some one person who enjoys the dissipation of a picnic in the woods, but Quentin was surprised to find that the attempt to make this one a success resulted in a most dismal failure, and but for the apparent enjoyment of Gartha, it seemed as if each one regretted his quiet, shady seat or room at the Abbey.

Madame sat most of the day under a tree in desultory conversation with Lord Eldon, giving Quentin an occasional glance, as if to say, "You see what you have forced me to." His feelings had undergone a change since he had rung the Abbey bell, now nearly two weeks ago, and he was quite certain that he should never again feel toward her as he had before the voluntary revelations of Valery had left so unpleasant an impression upon his mind. He did not avoid her, that he could not do, as she was his hostess, but he was seeing less of her during these days, which fact, so contradictory is human nature, made him feel somewhat gloomy. It is unpleasant to lose one's faith in a pleasant friend, one who has been perhaps somewhat nearer than a casual friend. This partial estrangement seemed to cause corresponding joy in the breast of Lord Eldon.

On the whole Quentin found himself not saddened by his approaching farewell to the Abbey. He wandered along by the side of the brook, his rod over his

shoulder, his head bent upon his breast, keeping pace as nearly as possible with the Rastaquouère.

"Shouldn't wonder in the least if she'd nail him yet," said Valery, as he stepped into the brook, rod in hand. "If there's one thing that Mamasha values more than eternal glory it's an earthly title. You may think that she wants but little here below, but I can tell you she wants that little pretty big and pretty long. Eldon must be at least twenty years older than Mamasha, and she's no chicken, but then he's got money to burn up, as you Americans say, and estates galore. You didn't encourage the old girl sufficiently, I fear, Quentin," and Valery gave him a sly poke in the region of the ribs with the end of his rod. "If I am booked for a new step-papa, I don't see why it couldn't have been you."

"What are you talking of, Valery dear?" called Madame from the seclusion which she and Lord Eldon had chosen.

"I'll tell you if you'll tell me what you are talking about," called back the irrepressible Valery. "Turn about's fair play, eh?"

Alixe and Gartha occupied their time in wandering in the meadows or on the hillsides, picking flowers. When they had found enough, they made them into wreaths, which was Gartha's fancy, and crowned Lord Eldon, who was thus made to appear, as he probably felt, extremely foolish, and even Valery submitted himself to the indignity and was made to look like a veritable Bottom, with his jovial face and broad smile encircled by a frame of leaves and flowers.

"Poor Alixe," said Valery, his wreath falling unbecomingly over one eye, "they have ruined her nationality among them."

"Her nationality?" asked Quentin.

"Yes, what country do you think claims her?"

"I thought her a Russian; but from her fluency in French I thought that perhaps——"

"Most of your people are fluent in French," said Valery, "more so I find than the English or the——"

"Not to speak of the Irish," said Quentin, laughing. "But what do you mean by my people? Surely Madame Alixe—Madame St——"

"Yes, an American. Her father was a——"

"A Russian," said Quentin, "General Petrofsky——"

"So Mamasha hasn't let you into the secrets of the prison house, my dear fellow. Well, I am not surprised. She is extremely kittenish, is Mamasha. Mamasha's past, as I have told you, is shrouded in mystery. Her first husband, the first she owns to, was Alixe's father. He, number one, was the father of my little wife, also."

Quentin wondered afterward why he had cared if Madame had been possessed in the past of forty husbands, and why two were more to be regretted than one, but at this time he did not reason with himself. He only felt discomforted at Valery's repetition.

"Yes, he was a very good sort," pursued Valery, "not in the least an outsider. My little wife worshipped his memory. I never saw him, my late lamented father-in-law. Alixe scarcely remembers him, she was so small when he died. Mamasha retired from the field of conquest for a short time, and then she emerged from her lair and went on her man hunt again. She lay at the mouth of her cave for a while, but the old birds were too shy. She could

never get them to come near enough to sprinkle salt on their tails. Then began the race over the length and breadth of Europe. Her first desire was a Prince. She rose one somewhere down in Roumania, I believe. That recalls—" Valery laughed—"her primeval name. Back in the dark ages, before she had all those husbands, it was Gordon. Some sharp American girl, jealous presumably, discovered it, and named her the Gordon Setter. That did for her with the Prince, and his bones did not whiten round her cave, much! Mamasha tried all sorts of bait for all sorts of game. Finally she wandered over to Russia, and there she bagged her General, one without even a patent of nobility."

"No one has a better position than an army officer, I suppose," said Quentin, who listened politely, although he had heard much of this before from Valery.

"Yes, if he had been. Don't know what the deuce he was. Whether general luggage-agent or general whipper-in to the serfs, when they crossed the steppes. At all events, I'll do him the credit to say that he was a kind old party, and as gold or silver or some kind of product had been discovered on some land of his somewhere, he sold out to the government and shook the Tzar. He was very kind to Mamasha, and the little girls, as well as to Bruno and Halle. They all piled right on to him. It was pretty hard on the old man when he found that Mamasha had elected him as Director-General of a regular orphan asylum, but Mamasha has no shame, and finally the General, simply worn out by the nursery business, just laid himself down and died like little Betty Pringle. This relieved the situation. Mamasha had

now quite a little bit of property. She could go where she pleased and pose as an interesting widow for the second or third time. My ancient history doesn't go back of Carleton."

"Come up here, Valery, and bring Mr. Quentin with you," called Madame from her seclusion upon the hillside. There was an anxious note in her voice.

"In a minute, Mamasha dear, when I catch this one I am after and one more," called Valery, then dropped his voice again. "She had a very comfortable sum, and she could travel about without any very great expenditure. She took those girls to all the watering-places on the French coast. She threw them at every man she saw, but she didn't have to make a cast very often, before I came by. I dropped to my little wife at the first throw, and I was never sad a day in my life until I lost her." Valery puffed away silently. He did not speak for some time, contenting himself with aimless casts of the fly, careless as to whether he succeeded in catching anything or not. When he at last spoke his voice trembled and his eye was moist.

"She's buried up there on the hill, poor little Allaire, near the General. Alixe would have it so, as soon as she came to live at the Abbey. Little Allaire's memory's always green with me. Mamasha keeps the General's memory green by digging the moss out of the title. A title's a big thing until you can snatch a bigger one." Valery shrugged his shoulders toward Madame and Lord Eldon and again threw his fly up-stream.

St. Aubin and Halle, strange personalities at a child's picnic, talked apart. The Baroness and Mademoiselle embroidered and sketched, Alixe and Gartha

occasionally cheering their solitude à deux by a passing remark, or a stop for a few moments in their neighborhood, but the spontaneity and intimacy of the house party appeared to be broken up.

It seemed a relief to every one but Gartha when it came time to return home, and the different members of the picnic party got into the char-à-bancs and the landau with a sigh of relief, and with no backward look at the ground where they had spent most of the day. All but Gartha.

"Alixe," she said, "I have had a perfectly lovely time, so good a time I have not esperienced not since quand j'étais gosse."

XXVII.

Quentin did not seek Alixe again. He was to leave the Abbey on the morrow; of what use? He sat upon his small balcony late into the evening, and watched far into the night, but nothing of either the natural or supernatural world came to disturb him. He arose with the sun. The early breakfast was to be a hurried meal, that the departing guests might catch their train. Quentin had promised to return with Lord Eldon to England; beyond that, he had not planned.

When he had drunk his coffee, listening meanwhile to Madame's voluble expressions of regret that he must leave the Abbey so soon, said in exactly the same tone in which he had heard her speak to Lord Eldon as they stood under the tree upon the terrace, apparently alone, he went to the château, to find the servants for the purpose of leaving with them that generous tip which Americans can never learn is the ruin of all foreigners of that class. He passed through the salon and into the dining room, but the place was empty. He was about to retrace his steps when he heard a voice that he knew. It was merely a sound that he had heard, but the sound was one of pain, and then he caught the words:

"Do not do that again, Bruno." The voice was that of Alixe. The tone was so decided that he waited, irresolute, wondering whether he ought to interfere. And then he stood silent, feeling that the

time had come when he had the right to listen. The next words that he heard were:

"You will cause me to leave the Abbey, Bruno. I will not bear it."

Quentin moved toward the open window. His footsteps were now heard by those without.

"Who is that?" called St. Aubin.

Quentin stepped quickly out upon the balcony. St. Aubin and Alixe were standing there. He was just releasing her wrist from his fingers. As he did so, Quentin, whose eyes were everywhere at this juncture, saw that the white skin bore a red mark, and that she at once clasped the reddened wrist with her other hand, whether to hide the signs of violence, or to soothe the wounded member, he could not tell.

St. Aubin twisted his ugly features into the semblance of a smile.

"Pardon me," said Quentin, "I am looking for Charles."

"Always arriving at the opportune moment, Mr. Quentin," said St. Aubin from between his teeth. "Perhaps you heard my wife crying out just now. Perhaps you thought it was beauty in distress, calling upon some true knight to deliver her."

"I heard voices," said Quentin, "and came out in the hope of finding Charles." His heart was beating tumultuously. He hardly knew what he was doing —was saying. He wondered afterward why he had not seized St. Aubin as he had the priest, and pitched him over the balcony. As he spoke, Alixe passed him without a word. She was very pale. Her eyes were blazing. Turning his back abruptly on St. Aubin, he followed and joined her inside the room,

and walked by her side until she had crossed it and had passed through the further door. He found himself within a square hall from which a flight of circular stairs ascended. This was a part of the Abbey into which he had never been asked to penetrate. She took no notice of him, walking so swiftly that he could hardly keep pace with her. As she placed her foot upon the lower stair—

"One moment!" he said, "I wish a word with you, before I leave."

"I shall not come down again, Mr. Quentin. What is it?"

"I am going away this morning," he replied, "within a few moments." And then, in hurried tones, "Promise me that if ever I can help you, you will send for me. I will come from the uttermost quarter of the earth. Promise me you will—" His voice shook so that she could but note his agitation. He slipped a card underneath a book lying upon the table. "That is my address. It will always find me, 'The Travellers.' Promise me—" Alixe did not look at him, she seemed only impatient at being detained. When she spoke, her voice was as steady as his was tremulous.

"Do not leave it," she said, "I shall never send. Good-by."

Without a hand clasp, without another look, she vanished up the stairway. He stood there until he heard that heavy upper door close upon her.

"Quentin," called Lord Eldon, "we shall lose our train! Where have you been?"

XXVIII.

"The wedding will come off in November," Lord Eldon had confided to Quentin as they crossed the Channel. "She's a dear little woman. Do you know, Quentin, I thought at one time that you were in my way there, but she assured me that you had never——"

"Oh, no, never!" Quentin hastened to assert, with perhaps too eager tone; "not because I do not consider her most attractive, but because—" Quentin ceased. Lord Eldon smiled to think how much more successful he had been with the charming widow than had this stalwart young American.

"I hope it isn't the title," continued the prospective bridegroom, somewhat distrustfully. "She assures me," etc., etc., etc., to all of which Quentin listened with an acquiescent smile. "I want to provide a home for her before Bruno makes ducks and drakes of all the remains of a once fine fortune."

"I thought they were so rich over there," said Quentin. "Miss Spencer gave me to understand——"

"Miss Spencer knows absolutely nothing about it," returned Lord Eldon. "When the Duca di Brazzia married, he had made a will leaving his wife a large fortune, but the second marriage played havoc with that. After St. Aubin's debts were paid, there was nothing more than a comfortable living for them, as

we look at things over here. Our poor little friend has a difficulty, I fear, in making both ends meet. The Duchess has always let care fall upon her poor little shoulders, and it still goes on. St. Aubin comes whining for money, and Madame gives it to him, at his wife's order. He sees how low the funds have fallen, and he is scrambling round to try to make something himself. That is certainly commendable, but the grand entertainments in Paris last year are what has caused the exchequer of the Duchess to run so low."

"Are you sure there were grand entertainments?" said Quentin. "Don't you think perhaps——"

"Oh, yes, yes," interrupted Lord Eldon, "for I have been at them, I am ashamed to say, now that I know the truth. Taking the whole Armenonville place and giving a fête. Asking sixty persons to breakfast at the Ritz. You cannot do this for nothing. Taking the Marquis of Alderney's yacht and filling it with people who play nothing but baccarat, at which Bruno is a very unlucky player, not to speak of the colossal debts that he incurred during his cousin's widowhood, all this is not conducive to piling up a fortune, as you Americans say. He has done some dirty tricks also. I have heard that he has had her casket of jewels reset entirely with paste."

Lord Eldon and his guest arrived at Eldon Towers late in the afternoon, and after a change of travel-stained garments, Quentin descended the stairs to be presented to Lord Eldon's sister, Lady Alfred Carstairs, and to find a table set with tea and a cheering assortment of hot dishes. His thoughts carried him back at a bound to that other tea table set within the

walls of the ruined Abbey, a spot which he felt now that he had visited for the last time.

The room was pleasantly filled with people, to some of whom Quentin was made known. He looked in vain for a familiar face, and was just seating himself upon a distant sofa, cup in hand, when his ears were greeted with:

"You dear thing! Where did you come from? Lady Alfred never told me that——"

"I told you that Eldon was bringing a friend, Ada," called Lady Alfred, from her seat at the table, as she caught these words pronounced in Miss Spencer's high-pitched key.

Miss Spencer seated herself at once by the stranger, taking possession of him, so to speak, with both manner and voice.

"You know I told you we should meet again. And to think that you have followed me all the way from the Abbey——"

"Isn't that what all your adorers do?" said Quentin gayly, shaking hands with the only person in the room whom he had ever seen before. "You can't think how I have looked forward to this meeting, Miss Spencer," said he, in his most flirtatious tones. Life was ended for him. Let him make the most of the dregs that remained.

"You dear thing," said Miss Spencer, "it is nice to see you. Did ce cher Bruno succeed in blowing you up over there in that dreary old Abbey? And did you fall in love with Alixe, like all the rest of the men? Ah! There you are, Lord Eldon. I hear great things of you and Mamasha. They say you never left her doubly-widowed side by day or——"

Lady Alfred looked quickly up. She had one son.

Failing an heir to Lord Eldon, her boy would come into the title and the estates.

"Sugar, Mr. Poncefort?" she said. "What's that, Eldon? Who is it? What did you say, Ada? Mamasha? What a remarkable name!" Lord Eldon was very red in the face and very angry all over.

"If you are speaking of Madame Petrofsky, Miss Spencer," he said, as coldly as his hot anger would allow, "I can only say that she is a very dear friend of mine, and I can see no reason why her pet name, used only in her own family, should be spoken by you here before all these people."

"But she's a dear friend of mine," returned the lively young woman, her tone simulating astonishment. "I always call her Mamasha, Lord Eldon. I call her so to her face. Which I venture to say is more than he does," she whispered in an aside to Quentin. "What is it? Has she really hooked him at last, as you Americans say? How furious Lady Alfred will be?" Her words implied that Madame's eagerly hunted quarry had been Lord Eldon. What man is without a spark of vanity? Quentin felt a slight sense of annoyance—although he had not responded as fully perhaps as was expected of him to Madame's kindness of manner—that any one should imagine that the opportunity had not been his had he chosen to grasp it.

Miss Spencer laughed.

"I see what the trouble is," she said. "The best of men are vain. Mamasha didn't make advances enough. Why, do you know, Mr. Quentin, I really thought she heard you say your prayers, and tucked you up every night." This was in whispered tones which Lord Eldon sidled near to catch if possible.

"Poor little Mamasha! She is going to be My Lady at last. Oh! you needn't take the trouble to deny it. I see it in his beaming smile, and his anger at my harmless remark." Quentin remained silent, though his vacuous look was almost an affirmation.

"I think they're a perfect pack of fools over there in that precious Abbey," continued Miss Spencer, turning her back on the others and addressing herself exclusively to Quentin. "Just imagine Alixe giving Bruno money to throw away! When I used to remonstrate with her she would say with that saintly smile of hers, 'Poor Bruno! It gives him so much pleasure, and he is not as fortunate as most people. Then, too, he thinks that a small fortune properly invested now will make a large fortune in the future. I tell him that I have plenty for both, but Bruno has really a great deal of pride.' That's Miss Alixe! Now, did you ever hear of such an absurdity, Mr. Quentin, sending good money after bad? I never could understand why Bruno is too good to live on his wife's money. All the other men do. I have heard lately that, after paying his debts, she really is crippled. The debts were colossal, and now he thinks he is going to make it up in some way. I don't think it makes a scrap of difference who has the money, do you, Mr. Quentin? Whether he's Spanish, American, bond or free, man or woman." And Miss Spencer nestled confidingly nearer to the good-looking American.

"No," he said, "I don't know that it does. What do you mean by Spanish, American, bond or free?"

"Oh, it's only my way of rattling on. That dear family over there does require so much explanation. Ce cher Bruno is a Spaniard, didn't you know it?

I've told you that before, but what I say seems to make very little impression."

"Yes, I've heard it, but with the surname of St. Aubin?"

"How stupid of you, Mr. Quentin! And why not? You may meet any amount of Frenchmen with German, Italian, or even English surnames. Your own name must have been French. Probably St. Quentin."

Quentin admitted the fact.

"There! See how careless you Americans are. Dropping a handsome prefix like 'St.' If I had a name or a prefix to conjure with, do you suppose that I would go about with such a common-place name as mine?"

"I consider Spencer a very distinguished name," said Quentin politely.

"Yes, but we don't belong to that family, you see. Now you wouldn't care at all. You Americans are so different to us."

"So——"

"Different. So different to us. What did you think I said?"

"I thought you said different from, but it makes no difference; I believe grammatical errors are fashionable over here."

"I consider that distinctly saucy," said Miss Spencer, moving away.

"Don't go," said Quentin; "come back and tell me if you have not heard from the Abbey lately."

"I have heard," said Miss Spencer, "and news that will somewhat surprise you, but until you learn to behave yourself, and not insult a British subject, I shall tell you nothing."

XXIX.

On the following day Quentin tried all means of pacification with Miss Spencer, but failed signally. It was not until two or three mornings after his conversation with her that she thawed sufficiently to allow him to sit on the same bench with her, under a spreading oak, and revert to the occupants of l'Abbaye de Bref. So long as he could not remain at the Abbey, he was glad to find himself in a place where he could see some one whom he knew, and who was interested in its inhabitants. Miss Spencer considered that several days of banishment of the best-looking man in the house was quite sufficient, considering that no one else at the Towers thought it worth while to snub the stranger; and, seeing that a certain Lady Kate found Quentin extremely agreeable, and that her absences with him on long walks about the place were becoming somewhat marked, Miss Spencer felt that the time had come to thaw. She found, a fact which did not give her any particular satisfaction, that a word about the Abbey was enough to draw him near, and though she was inwardly provoked at the thought, she used her bait judiciously, so that it came about that Lady Kate, one morning, much to her chagrin, saw the two seated upon the shady bench, Quentin evidently so engrossed that he did not even see her as she passed them by. Lady Kate happened to be a young woman of un-

bounded curiosity, and the sentence that she caught as she walked slowly past Miss Spencer and Quentin, did not in the least allay that curiosity.

"Did you ever discover," asked Miss Spencer, in rather louder tones than were necessary to carry to Lady Kate's listening ear, "what they were doing over there in the chalet at night?"

"What who were doing?" questioned Quentin in turn. "I lived in the chalet and I was sleeping principally."

"I don't mean you, of course. I know all about that, even to Mamasha's religious training of her latest acquisition. I know you said you slept. I mean that precious Bruno and his pious assistant, that priestly imp of darkness. My room overlooked the terrace. It was next to the one Alixe has always occupied, the Abbess's room, you know, with the iron doors. I wouldn't have slept in that bed for an American fortune. The most ghostly, ghastly, weird thing! It looks like the Great Bed of Ware. Just the sort of thing you are shown in the houses where Elizabeth stopped, when she made her progresses. It had to be large, I suppose, to keep pace with the room. That, I believe, is almost the size of the great salon. Even in the room they gave me, not such a desert waste as the Abbess's, but big and gloomy as a barn, I always had my maid sleep on the lounge."

"Why?" asked Quentin.

"As if you didn't know the stories! Not that I ever saw anything, but you know They never come to two persons together."

"Who?" asked Quentin.

"Oh, come now," returned Miss Spencer, with an

incredulous look in her eyes, "you know very well what I am talking about."

"You know the Towers is haunted, don't you?" asked Quentin.

"Yes, the other wing. I never sleep there. In fact, this visiting at swell country places is the most wearing process; it's going to be my death. Now don't you think I've fallen off, really? I go to these ghostly old houses and never sleep a wink, and the consequence is that I'm so sleepy all day that I'm dreadfully dull. Just as I get accustomed to my surroundings, and find that They're not coming to frighten me, or that They appear in the other part of the house, my time is up, and I have to move on, and then it is worse than ever. Come, now! Tell me why those lights were burning in broad daylight——"

"Probably fell asleep and forgot to put them out," said Quentin carelessly.

"Very likely. Now, what do you suppose was the reason?"

"The same reason as your own—afraid!" said he, laughing.

"Nonsense," said Miss Spencer, "not two of them. They were up to some dark and deadly deeds."

"He always spoke very freely of his chemicals," said Quentin, who, much as he disliked St. Aubin, did not care to discuss his methods with Miss Spencer, after having been a guest of the house where he was at least nominal head.

"Haven't you any idea?" pursued his questioner.

Quentin was silent.

"Not the slightest?"

"I can't see anything so mysterious about it," said Quentin." "Of course if you were afraid of his ex-

periments, you were right to leave the Abbey, but Lord Eldon and I remained some days later, and we escaped alive, as you see."

"He may not have been making experiments at all," acquiesced Miss Spencer.

"This much I know. Those great carboys that came just before you all flew away in such terror were filled with St. Evian."

Miss Spencer burst into a fit of laughter so shrill that Lady Kate, who was talking with the gardener in the near neighborhood, started at the sound and looked toward the couple.

"I believe Harry Ware was right," said she when she could speak.

"Harry Ware?" said Quentin inquiringly.

"You never saw him. He was there the week before you came. He was another of dear Mamasha's discoveries. He was full of Americanisms, a perfect little cad. How they stood him I do not see."

"Gartha thought him charming," said Quentin. He fell to laughing softly, recalling Gartha's words and manner as she repeated the words, "That is the last of Hen—e—ry Ware."

"I learned lots of Americanisms from him," continued Miss Spencer. "I am never quite sure what the different ones mean, but I think they are lovely all the same."

Quentin listened, an amused smile upon his lips.

"I have been stopping in the house of one of your rich Westerners," she continued, "and he very often said that he felt like a busted-up sequence. What is a busted-up sequence, Mr. Quentin?"

"I never heard of one. Why didn't you ask your Western friend?"

"Why! He did tell me, but I have forgotten. At all events, it is extremely picturesque. Don't you think so?"

"I don't think anything picturesque that I don't understand," said her listener.

"And now it seems to me it was a flush. Not a sequence, a flush. A busted-up flush."

Quentin shook his head.

"Oh, come now, Mr. Quentin. Don't be so serious. Where were you born?"

"Near a little town on the North River."

"The North River? Is that in Canada?"

"I ought to have said the Hudson River. I spoke locally."

"Oh! Hudson's Bay?"

"No, in New York. I am aware that it's the fashion to know nothing about us over here——"

"Now that isn't fair. I may as well say that you know nothing about us. Come, now! Tell me the counties of England? There! You are silent. Born in New York, you say? How can there be a river in a city, and also a little town and——"

"We have a State called New York."

"Oh, yes. I have heard so. How large is that?"

"A little larger than England."

"How you do like to tease one, Mr. Quentin. I shall go away."

"It is quite true. I was born in the country near the little village. That was our post-office town. It is a mile away from our house."

"Oh! Not born in the village! You Americans come up so suddenly! I thought you might have been born in a place like Dillston or Ledley. How large was the village?"

"About a thousand people."

"What were they like? Did you know any of them?"

"Oh, yes, I know them all."

"Know them? Mercy on me! How terribly democratic!"

"Well, not exactly what you would call knowing them. Rather, they knew me. I grew up there as a lad. I knew every house in the place. I used to run into them as a child——"

"Run into people's houses? How did you dare?"

"There was no daring about it. They asked me. I knew their children. My grandfather owned their village, besides another farther on; but of course I didn't take advantage of that. They were all my friends and were glad to have me come."

"Owned two villages!" exclaimed his listener. "How did he come to?"

"It was a grant of land given to one of my ancestors in 1690, I believe. It was granted by William and Mary. The yellow old parchment hangs in my grandfather's hall, queer old signatures, and——"

"Ancestors!" exclaimed Miss Spencer, "I didn't know you had any over there."

"We can't help it," Quentin smiled teasingly. "We don't all believe in either the protoplasm or the Darwinian theory. I know we haven't any rights in the way of having ancestors, but we had to descend from somebody, we couldn't all be hod-carriers, there wouldn't be hods enough, you see."

"Don't be nasty, Mr. Quentin," pleaded Miss Spencer, settling down again. "I really am interested to learn all about you. I wish you would tell me some more Americanisms. Harry Ware told me

some more. Oh, yes, I remember one," and Miss Spencer mentioned some words which are seldom heard by ears polite.

"What queer people your friend must know," remarked Quentin carelessly. "Isn't it a pity that while he is there he shouldn't try to know the best?"

"Is it really so bad?" said Miss Spencer astonished. "I thought it was only an Americanism! Come, now, don't be nasty! He did not say that your President and Parliament used it habitually, but he said——"

"Did he tell you anything about the slave States of Vermont and about our smearing corn with molasses and eating it? I've heard a tale something like that over here; but, come, Miss Spencer, don't let us indulge in unpleasant personalities as regards our respective countries. I am sure I am devoted to you and yours. Tell me, to change the subject, have you heard from your friends across the Channel of late?"

"Oh, yes," returned Miss Spencer with a superior tone; "I had a letter from Madame only two or three days ago."

"And you never told me?"

"Why should I tell you? Besides, we were not on speaking terms."

"You mean that you were not. I was always your bounden slave. Tell me how things are going at the Abbey."

Quentin spoke with an assumption of carelessness; in reality his heart was thumping violently, and there was a rushing sound so loud in his ears that it almost drowned Miss Spencer's reply.

"The Abbey is closed," she said.

"What! What did you say?"

"The Abbey is closed."

"Closed? The Abbey is closed? How long has it been closed?"

"Oh, it's been closed since just after you left. That very day, I think, or the next. I heard it from Mademoiselle. Mr. Valery has taken Gartha over to see some relatives. Bruno has flown away on one of those mysterious trips of his, dear, pretty, playful, little bear that he is! That dreadful priest has gone in hiding. Mamasha bundled every one out, neck and crop, after you left. The poor old Baroness will have to sit in front of Maxim's now, if she wants to catch a glimpse of her Baron. Mamasha and Mademoiselle have gone into an apartment. Mademoiselle says that Mamasha seems to be buying out the shops: Pacquin, Raudnitz, Au Gagne Petit, Louvre, all's fish that comes to Mamasha's net."

"You have not mentioned—mentioned—Al—Madame—Madame St. Au—the—the—Duch—" stammered Quentin helplessly.

"Don't flounder so! It's really distressing! I don't wonder you don't know her name. It never seems to me as if Alixe had a name. What! Haven't you heard about her?"

"Heard about her?" the color left Quentin's cheek. His breath came thick.

"You, too," said Miss Spencer, surveying him coolly. "Well, I'm not astonished. They are all like that. I don't know why it is, she certainly has no beauty, and she's so——"

"She has gone? Where?"

"That's just the point," said his informant. "Nobody knows."

"Nobody knows?"

Miss Spencer shook her head. She had never been of such deep interest to Quentin before. She intended to keep him in that frame of mind as long as possible.

"Surely you know something."

"This is the story that Mademoiselle wrote me—Now, this is a lesson to you. Don't quarrel with your best friend. Had you treated me properly——"

"And Mademoiselle said——"

"Mademoiselle said that early on the morning that you resolved to leave the Abbey, she had breakfasted, and was sitting in her window doing what she calls a sketch, one of those interminable daubs of hers, I suppose——"

"Her window! Where is her window?"

"Just over the little balcony outside the small breakfast room. She said that she was quite busy, and not thinking particularly of the château or its inhabitants, when suddenly she heard voices underneath. She listened, without listening, until she heard your name. You know perhaps that ce cher Bruno did you the honor to be jealous of you. Then, when she heard your name, she began to listen. She hates Bruno almost as badly as Gartha does, and she is one of the few women who adore Alixe. I suppose that Alixe's interfering with her is so remote a possibility——"

"And then——"

"Suddenly she heard a scream. She said it was a sort of subdued scream. I don't read French very well, but I gather that it sounded as if Alixe couldn't help it, as if she tried to suppress it. Then she heard another—Mademoiselle, I mean. She leaned

out of her window very cautiously, for fear that Bruno should spy her, you know in what mortal terror they all stand of Bruno, and she saw that Bruno had the wrist of Alixe in his yellow fingers, and was twisting it round as far as he could, so far, in fact, that he had brought her to her knees. She heard Alixe say in tones of increased passion, yes, these were the words, 'Accès de colère!'—'Coward! You coward!' she said, 'let me go!' Oh, you needn't be worried. I don't believe he got anything out of Alixe. She has the obstinacy of a mule."

Quentin spoke very fast and monotonously.

"Well, well, tell me at once, do you hear? At once, where she has gone?"

"Oh, now! was it going to lash itself into a rage, and thrash about, and go into hysterics? Calm its little self, do!"

"Will you tell me, or shall I go to Lord Eldon?" Quentin started as if to rise.

"Bless you, he doesn't know! Nobody knows. They haven't the most remote glimmering of an idea. Mamasha doesn't care, because she has other fish to fry, and the fire may go out. Is it the old gentleman? Do tell me. I had designs in that direction myself, but if Mamasha has her clutch on him——"

"Did she leave no message?"

"Who, Mamasha? Oh, you mean Alixe! No, the place is as empty as my pocket. There is no one left there but the servants. Even the superior Barker is gone."

"Did she leave the Abbey before Madame Petrofsky?" was Quentin's next question.

"Yes, she left first, between two days, Mademoiselle said. And then the dear little Bruno left.

Don't you love him for his grotesqueness? I should like to have him for a pet; it would be just like having a mongoose or a hyena, wouldn't it? You needn't hurry me so,"—in answer to a flash from Quentin's eye,—"after she had shaken the dust from her soul —soles, I mean——"

"Then? Then? Then?"

"Then that surly priest went off, faded away, they said, as if he never had been. He was positively of no use at a house party. You couldn't get up a flirtation with him to save your soul. Then Mamasha bundled the rest of them out, and the place is given over to the ghosts."

"Where can she be?" exclaimed Quentin, half rising.

"Who? Mamasha? Somewhere up near the Arc, I believe, near the Champs Elysees, Rue Balzac, I think; or no! It's the other side, Avenue de l'Alma. At all events, I will give you the address, if you want to write——"

"I do not mean Madame; I mean——"

"Oh, Alixe! That I can't tell you. How often must I repeat it! She has hidden her trail so well that even Bruno can't find her. Poor little cub! I wouldn't be married to Alixe for all the fortunes of the Orient. She's always up in the clouds, always in heroics, mourning over the dead, or the living, or——"

Quentin was not listening to Miss Spencer, he was wondering, wondering, wondering, and his surmises brought to him no answer. Had she but sent for him as he had asked her to do! But, of course, she could not send for him, the thought was absurd. Miss Spencer's voice was going on, though he hardly heard it.

"Alixe always was a perfect idiot. The idea of letting Mamasha take enough of her fortune to pay Bruno's debts. They say that Mamasha, dear little honest soul, stowed enough away to keep herself going. Alixe knows nothing about money; so little, that they say she still thinks herself rich. This I have just heard from Mademoiselle. She hates Mamasha, though she has to live with her. You know one must live, and she would die anywhere else, for no one would have her, she——"

Miss Spencer's stream of words was brought to a standstill by Quentin, who had risen.

"I am going to Paris this afternoon, Miss Spencer," he said. "Can I take a message to Madame Petrofsky for you?"

"Going to Paris!" she gasped, rising in her turn, and discovering too late that the very means which she had taken to keep him were hurrying him away from Eldon Towers.

"Where can I find a time-table?" he said; and started impetuously toward the house. Miss Spencer found herself forced to accompany him across the lawn in a most undignified gait.

"Don't race so," she said, "I can't get my breath. You can't get away until after lunch, that I know. I hardly know if you will be able to catch the night boat. You don't really mean it?"

"Yes, I certainly do mean it. I will go and tell my man. Meantime, if you will just write down Madame Petrofsky's address for me, I shall be obliged."

XXX.

As Quentin left Eldon Towers, Miss Spencer handed him a folded paper. She did this with an air of proprietorship which enraged one or two onlookers, who knew as well as Miss Spencer herself that she had no proprietary rights vested in this good-looking stranger. But to their astonishment he seized upon the paper as if it were the deed of a gold mine, and thanked the giver effusively, almost tenderly. This puzzled those who saw it, and caused Miss Spencer to chuckle to herself for the next few days. "Even if you can't have a thing," she mused, "it is just as well to make other people think you've got it. It enhances your value."

Quentin crossed from Southampton in one of those particularly dirty boats which make one feel that England still lives in the dark ages, so far as travel is concerned, but the journey was made more quickly in this way because of the proximity of Eldon Towers to the lines running to that ancient and smoke-begrimed city. He had wired for a room on board the boat, but when he reached the wharf he found that the only one had been given to a woman with a little ailing child. Naturally, there was nothing to be said.

"Where are those fine boats," he asked of a dirty cabin boy, "which this company advertises extensively as crossing every night to France?" He

was answered that they'd been "took hoff to run to the Channel h'islands as the ter'havel was so 'eavy."

The night was dark and rainy, the soot was falling everywhere, and when Quentin arose in the morning, the light grey suit in which he had travelled was a mass of streaks and blotches. He had obtained the seclusion which he desired by a liberal douceur to the captain, who must probably remain up all night, as the weather was very thick and foggy. The boat arrived at Havre too late for the Paris train, and he must fain content himself with rebellious patience for some hours, until another train should start. He reached Paris late in the afternoon, and when he had removed the signs of travel he left his hotel, and went in search of Madame.

Quentin drove to the apartment house whose address Miss Spencer had given him. He asked for Madame Petrofsky, and almost pushed past the concierge in his haste to mount the stairs. The woman looked astonished, and said at once that the lady did not live there.

"But she does live here," replied Quentin. "Here is her address." The concierge took the paper, turned it upside down, and wrong side up, studied the enigmatical English screed, and then repeated that the lady did not live at No. 37.

"Who is living in the house?" asked Quentin imperatively.

"In the entresol was a French family. Au premier was the American consul. These Americans always took the finest floor and paid the highest prices. Why, only yesterday, if Monsieur would believe it, Henri went just across the Champs Elysées on a

small errand, and when he returned the American monsieur gave him one franc fifty——"

"Have you no idea where Madame Petrofsky lives? A Russian lady accompanied by a small French lady?" Here Quentin recalled Gartha's description of the Weasel, and was almost minded to recite, "Elle est caractérisée de la manière suivante." However, his description was a minute one, which would not have sounded exactly flattering to Mademoiselle had she heard it. Madame was described with the same minuteness, but she came off better at his hands. Still, the pleasant-faced concierge smiled and shook her head and insisted that no such ladies lived in the house, that Monsieur must have deceived himself, the address must be wrong. These English had much to learn in the matter of writing. "Sale Anglais!" muttered the concierge under her breath, not quite sure of her ground, through not having learned that Monsieur belonged to the lavish, English-speaking, American nation. Quentin put some money into her hand to encourage her memory.

"Are there no Russian ladies living in this street or in this block?"

"How can I say, Monsieur? Does the Monsieur expect me to know all the ladies who come to take the apartments for a little while in the street or in the square?" her smile growing more broad as she hastily slipped the douceur within her capacious pocket, to avoid the lynx eyes of her husband, who just then appeared in the court. Quentin went to the next house and then the next, but with no success. He then dismissed his cab, and going to a nearby telegraph station, he wired to Miss Spencer at Eldon Towers, "I cannot find Madame Petrofsky

at that address. Have you not made a mistake? Please wire correct address at once." Like most men with one idea and an uncontracted bank account, he left no chance for misunderstanding because of curtailing his sentences. To make sure of a reply he added, "Answer. Twenty words paid," signed his name, gave his hotel address, and then started off at railway speed, he had not considered where.

After ten minutes' walk he found himself in the Cours la Reine. He looked about him with as much astonishment as that which possesses a Frenchman who knows nothing but his own quarter; but for the moment all places were alike to him. The discomfort of the all-pervading dust which was flying from the buildings in process of being erected for the great Exposition caused him to look about for another cab. He had passed the stand at the corner of the Avenue Montaigne, and as, at the moment, one of those Juggernauts, a French tram-car or train of cars, came along, lumbering and groaning and clearing the way with its irrepressible tooting horn, Quentin with a quick bound was upon the step, and climbing to the top, unheeding the remonstrance of the guard, who informed him with a very serious tone that he might have been killed by so daring an act. Quentin laughed in his face, whereupon the guard, not wishing to create a scene with so well dressed a man, shrugged his shoulders, muttering, "Crazy English," and returned without further remonstrance to the taking of fares. Quentin walked to the front and took a vacant seat just behind the driver. His back was toward the river, his face toward the driveway. He was ruminating deeply. "Why should Miss Spencer have given me the wrong address? What could

have been the reason? Was it purposely done?" Quentin took the paper from his breast pocket, and again scrutinized the address. No, he was right. There it stood, 37 as plain as possible. Suddenly he thought, "Why did I not telegraph to Lord Eldon? He would have known. If Alixe is in Paris, I must see her some time, but Madame must know her whereabouts. It cannot be that she is ignorant of her own daughter's address—I must see——"

A carriage was whirling swiftly past in the opposite direction. Quentin at first regarded it absently, and then he suddenly rose in his seat calling, "Stop! Stop!" and began to push frantically along to the back of the car, for in that carriage sat the object of his thoughts. She was with a man, and that man the Archbishop. Quentin had hardly recognized her before he saw that he too was recognized by her. He ran, he called, he stared, he pushed past the passengers, like the crazy man to whom the guard had likened him, and as he ran, he waved his hand to her. She did not smile nor did she call the attention of the Archbishop to him. It was but for a moment, and then it was the back of the landau at which he was staring blindly, as he felt his way down the stairs. There was a tussle at the foot as he tried to spring to the ground. This he succeeded in doing, notwithstanding the rage of the guard, who threatened him with certain arrest and demanded his card, but he was still threatening, still demanding, as Quentin had thrown himself into a passing fiacre and was whirled away after a landau which was going rapidly up the Cours la Reine. Although his cocher had been ordered to drive like a gentleman not mentioned in polite history, the coming Exposition was a factor

in his discomfiture. The great scaffoldings, the piles of earth, the enormous wagons which were unloading jangling, crashing bars of iron on to the pavement, all blocked his way, and when he turned into the Avenue Montaigne, he saw to his confusion that there were several carriages ahead of him. He chose one which had, he thought, a familiar aspect, and its chase led him to the Champs Elysées. The cocher, by dint of beating his poor little horse, and in view of the liberal offers of pourboire, managed to follow the landau closely, and Quentin came up abreast of it and was lost, as it rolled across into the Rue Washington, for as he agitatedly turned to see whom the carriage contained, he found only an aged dowager inside, and two very fat poodle dogs looking out aimlessly on either side. With a sharp word at his ill luck, he ordered the cab turned about, and drove to his hotel, there to wait an answer to his message to Miss Spencer.

XXXI.

QUENTIN sat in his hotel all that evening, waiting for the answer which was to make the world rose-colored again for him. No such occurrence came to cheer him, however, and he went to bed, angry with the world and Miss Spencer, and Madame in particular; Madame, his whilom friend. It was strange that she had not written him of her flight from the Abbey. Why had not Lord Eldon told him of it? The only answer to this was that Englishmen are proverbially reticent, and Lord Eldon might not have thought that the subject was of interest to Quentin. When day came, he went at once to the telegraph office. He wired Miss Spencer again and received this provoking answer: "Did not wire name hotel. Must made a mistake. Possibly wrote seven for nine." This was as Sanscrit to Quentin. He saw now very plainly that Miss Spencer had not intended to let him have Madame's address, if she could prevent it. He then wired Lord Eldon: "Kindly send me Madame Petrofsky's address in Paris."

Late on the following day he received an answer from Lady Albert Carstairs: "Have not the most remote idea what it is. Eldon gone off to see his uncle. Sudden attack. Dying in Scotland."

Again he telegraphed, and this time for Lord Eldon's address, and after another night of suspense it came to him. A message to Lord Eldon to the Scot-

tish address was finally answered, and having spent three fruitless days in Paris, eating his heart out, he at last rang the bell at the number which Lord Eldon had sent him. This time he was ushered into the apartments of Madame Petrofsky, and while awaiting that lady's appearance, which seemed imminent from the sounds of the jerking out and closing of bureau drawers, he went to the window and looked out. Just across the way he gazed down into the pleasant face of the concierge who had assured him but three days before that no such ladies as those whom he sought lived in the street.

After awhile the rustling and thumping ceased. There was dead quiet for a moment. Quentin could imagine it occupied with those mysteries of the toilet which are accomplished by soft little pats and wipings-off on cheek and chin, and which make no noise while in progress. Then the door opened, and Madame came into the room. She ran toward Quentin with a little cry of joy. It warmed his heart, which his good sense told him not to allow.

"You dear!" she said, holding his hands in both of hers. "How good it seems to see you again. And how good of you to send me that charming chain. Quite the prettiest thing that I have had thus far. And what are you doing in Paris?"

"I came to ask you a very important question," answered Quentin; "at least, a question important to me."

"Sit down, dear friend," said Madame. She arranged herself becomingly against a pillow of Indian red which set off the black lace pleatings about her face and throat. Her back was to the light, a bit of calculation which Quentin did not notice. How

young she looked, with her trim figure, and chiffons and laces of the most modern type. Quentin, even with other thoughts uppermost, noticed several things about her dress that he had never seen before. She was indeed to be a brand new bride for Lord Eldon. Quentin sat down and faced her. The little light that was allowed to penetrate fell full upon his expressive face, and struck deep into the honest grey eyes. She leaned toward him, her lips trembling, a slight pulsation of her pretty cheek showing that she, too, had interesting thoughts.

"I hesitate," he said, "because it is a subject on which I fear you cannot be in accord with me; but wrong though it is, and wrongly as I may place myself within your eyes, I must know the truth."

Madame raised those beautiful innocent eyes of hers to his. "Tell me what it is, dear friend," she said. "Tell me what it is."

"If you should refuse," murmured Quentin, "what should I do? What should I do? Do you know," he went on agitatedly, "that I have been looking for you for three whole days? I have wired to England, I have taken every means to find you——"

"Has Eldon given you my address?" As Madame asked the question she made room for him beside her. "Sit here," she said, "sit here by me." He got up with a sigh and threw himself wearily beside her. She slid her plump hand along her flounces, and laid it within his. He started at its unexpected touch, but gave it a kindly answering pressure.

"There is nothing that I would not do for you," said she. "I am not bound in any way. No, I am bound only to please myself. I have made no promises which will prevent. Only speak! Speak, my

friend, and say what it is that you wish." She was so near Quentin now that he was somewhat disconcerted. He loosened his grasp of her hand and withdrew a little.

"You will tell me?" he said almost sternly.

"Yes, yes! What is it?" Madame looked thoroughly frightened. She knew not at what. A life of love had ever been, was still the craving of her perennially juvenile heart. Contradictory as the statement may seem, when one considers all Madame's small failings, it is a true one. Her marriages had been to her mind distinct successes from a worldly standpoint, but she felt that she had been sacrificed, first, on the altar of Carleton, a man, though charming, whom she had not loved, and yet again, on account of the little ones, for whom her slender purse had not been able to provide. Could love come to her but once before she should pass that terrible boundary where youth ends, and old age has its beginning, she would thank the gods and leave worry for others less fortunate than she.

Neither of Madame's marriages had been love marriages, and she had failed to reach that acme of supposititious perfect bliss. Madame thought that she could live a life of joy if all things would but conspire to aid the end she had ever had in view. Our hearts are not withered at forty-three, nor at fifty-three, and oftentimes not at sixty-three; it all depends upon the digestion. Ah! poor soul, how could Quentin be so single-minded as to dispel all sentiment within her breast; but when was impetuous, youthful love ever kind, except to the chosen one?

"Where is Alixe?" asked Quentin.

Ah, it had come! That terrible question which she was dreading, yet hoping not to hear.

"Alixe?" Poor Madame! She swallowed something, that felt like a knot of cotton wool in her throat, and again she said, "Alixe?"

Madame's digestion was perfect. She had been invisible on occasions because of headache, but when the reason for invisibility had subsided the headache had subsided also. To this perennial heart, then, what must have been the shock when Quentin erased all sentiment for him forever within her breast, by repeating bluntly, "Where is Alixe?"

"Alixe? You surprise me!" Madame sat up very straight. "Why should you speak of her in that way? You hardly know her."

"That is quite true," acquiesced Quentin. "You need not remind me of that. I have forgotten conventionality, but I—I fear she is in great trouble. I—I—am led to suppose—" He broke off suddenly, and looked Madame full in the eye, that handsome eye which heretofore had looked so kindly upon him. "Do you know where she is?" he said.

Madame, grown white, by reason of the chill which her cherished sentiment had received, sank back upon her sofa quite regardless of her chiffons, and replied, "I do not."

"Not know where your own daughter is?" exclaimed Quentin, with a mixture of sternness and entreaty in his voice.

"My niece? She has wilfully left me."

"Very well, then, your niece, though this is no time for shams. Valery has told me something of the family history——"

"It was like him," interrupted Madame.

"It is of little interest whether the relation that she bears to you is that of niece, daughter, or granddaughter—" Quentin was so selfishly in earnest that his words seemed possessed of great brutality. Madame turned a greenish shade, she gasped. A reply did not come at her bidding.

"I must find her," finished Quentin.

Madame struggled to speak. When she could move her stiff lips the words came haltingly.

"I see no reason why you should find her, she a married woman, you a young—you an unmarried man; and she herself is the last one who would wish it. You are not of our family, that you should come interfering in this way. Rest assured that when we need your assistance, Mr. Quentin——"

"I have no desire to interfere, Madame"—Quentin was quite oblivious that this was exactly what he was doing, at that moment—"but I hear that she has left her home; that the Abbey is closed, deserted! I beg of you—I beg of you, tell me why."

His voice shook and died away almost to a whisper. In that agitation Madame read the death-blow to her hopes. She began at once to compose a mental letter to Lord Eldon, telling him that she would be ready at the earliest date which he had named. When she answered Quentin, her voice also trembled, but it was cold and distant.

"I cannot tell you where she is," she said.

"You mean you will not."

"I mean that I cannot. Oh! what have I done that that woman always comes between my friends and me? I mean it, I cannot! I do not know."

"You do not know the address of the person or persons with whom she is at the moment?"

"No! No! No! How often must I tell you, No!"

"Will you swear it?"

"I will swear it if it will give you any particular comfort, if it will cause you to believe me, and insult me no further." She put her shaking, beringed hands before her face. A long sigh escaped her, the sigh of final relinquishment.

"Oh, Madame!" exclaimed Quentin, "I have hurt you! Believe me, I am sorry. I am too wretched to know what I am doing; I—I thought you might have seen her. I saw her yesterday——"

"You saw her yesterday. Where?"

Quentin was about to say, "With the Archbishop," but the conviction that had Alixe wished her mother to know her whereabouts, she would have confided in her, prevented. What right had he to disclose that which he had procured only by chance?

"I saw her in a carriage in the Cours la Reine," said he.

"Then she is in Paris. Did you speak to her?"

"Do you suppose that had I been able to speak to her I should be here begging her address from you?"

The tone was sharp; Madame called it harsh in her thoughts.

"Did she see you?"

"She saw me, yes, I think she saw me."

"Oh, then, she did not recognize you! Would not, perhaps." Why should not Madame also administer a few stings?

"No, not what you would call recognize me." It came over him again, painfully, that she had looked at him, but had made no sign of recognition.

"She is no better then to you, it seems, than to the

rest of us," said Madame. "She has behaved in a most unkind manner to her husband and to me. I wash my hands of her henceforth, from this day."

"In what way was she unkind to you?" asked Quentin.

"She left us in the night. When, I do not know. They are all in her pay at the Abbey." Quentin smiled grimly as the literal truth of this statement forced itself on his mind. "They pretend to know nothing. I only know that she had not been to bed. She took her maid Nanette and left us like that"—Madame snapped her glittering fingers in air—"without a word."

"I thought you would know something," said Quentin miserably.

Madame laughed unpleasantly.

"Je ne suis pas la rose," she said shrilly, "mais j'ai vécu avec elle. However, that is over; I doubt if we live together ever again. Valery, great Irish pig! only laughed and rubbed his hands, and said that Bruno and I would see at last that Alixe had some spirit. Spirit! Stealing away in the night! As for Bruno, it is killing him. He loves her to distraction."

"He must!" said Quentin dryly.

"What do you mean! I never saw a man so changed. His business keeps him away a great deal, to be sure, but——"

"What business?" asked Quentin. "I knew that he trifled a little with potash and chlorides, but as to anything serious——"

"You shall not speak so to me of Bruno." Madame arose, her face was flushed, her eyes were no longer innocent, but very angry. "He has made

some very good sums of late. I don't know exactly what his business is, but——"

"Well!" said Quentin desperately, "that is neither here nor there. If you really cannot, or will not, tell me where she is——"

At this Madame collapsed upon the sofa, bent her well-preserved face upon the pillow and burst into a rage of tears. "How can you?" she said. The smothered sounds came through several inches of swansdown. Quentin stood uncomfortable—irresolute. He could not take up the rôle of comforter; that had become distasteful to him, and besides it was full of danger. He stood there, looking down upon the top of the well ondulé hair of his sometime friend, wondering how the affair would all end. Madame was really crying; there was no pretence about that, at any rate. Finally, between heartrending sobs, "Lower the shades," she said. "All of them; that one over there at the corner. I am a perfect fright when I cry."

Quentin obediently lowered the heavy green curtains, one after the other, and reduced the room to Cimmerian darkness. He feared to stir. In imagination he saw disaster to the numerous little tables in his path. As he stood for a moment to get his bearings, and accustom himself to the absence of light, "Do you know," said Madame in smothered tones, "that you will make trouble for Alixe if you hound her about in this way?"

He was feeling his way warily toward the door. "Do you hear me?" The voice had lost the sound of coming through down. She must be sitting up.

"I am not hounding her," Quentin weakly pleaded. After he had said these words he continued to grope toward the door. He went, softly groping, groping,

groping. Ah! his hand was on the knob. What luck! He held it firmly.

"And what do you intend to do now? Don't stand there by the window. Come over here and tell me what you intend doing now?"

"Nothing," answered Quentin, as he suddenly turned the knob. A strong flood of light entered, but was as quickly banished as he shut himself away from the presence of Madame and ran down the stairs and out into the Paris sunshine.

XXXII.

When Quentin had gone without doubt, Madame rose and drew up the shades. Then she went into her room and made herself charming again. Madame was one who would have dressed for herself had she lived upon an oasis in the desert. One could not imagine her without a hand-glass and powder puff. When these articles and others as necessary had been put to good use, she returned to the salon and opened her desk.

If the whereabouts of Alixe were unknown to most persons it was not a secret from her brother-in-law, who, however, when Madame wrote, saying, "Of course you know where she is, Valery dear; you always encourage her," answered, "Know where Alixe is? How should I know?" Now Madame sat down to bombard Valery with more arguments, making eight pages of a single sheet. These intricate crossings tried the good eyes and sweet temper of the Rastaquouère.

"I am a good Catholic, Valery dear, as you know, a very devoted daughter of the church; but if Alixe is, as I have reason to believe, somewhere in hiding, where the dear Archbishop has access to her, she may after all join my faith, and then all that fine property will go to the church. I do not know exactly what the French laws are with regard to a wife's property and her husband's rights in it; but dearly as I love

Bruno, I really think he has had all that he should have, and as you once said to me, it is only throwing good money after bad. If the dear Archbishop knows where Alixe is, and Bruno should die suddenly, I fear that before we could prevent it, she would enter a convent, and give all her money to the church. This I highly approve of in some cases, but not in others, such as ours, for instance, where my property is so very small, and I cannot live decently unless I have a home with Alixe."

Although Valery had propounded to his young mother-in-law the question as to how he should know where Alixe might be, he, on that very day, addressed an envelope to her in his big bold hand. It had been brought to him by a very young woman for correction, a young woman who like too many children of her nationality had been educated in Paris and knew little or nothing of the spelling of her native tongue. He had read it while sipping his coffee in the garden and had laughed unrestrainedly over its length and strange sentences. He had said to Gartha, "I couldn't make it any better; really I couldn't, Gartha. I should only spoil it. Let it go as it is."

Gartha put on a conscious air and plumed herself as she had seen the young peacocks do at Countess Blandina's.

"I am of an education somewhat high," said Gartha. "I can speak four of the languages, moi! The English, that comes the first, being the one that is worth speaking. The argot of the Quartier Latin comes the next. Marie Monrouge, her cousin is an artist-peintre. He teached it. Expressions of the sort 'espèce de type,' and 'sale Prusse,' and 'sale Anglais;' though I, who love the English, would never

say such a thing. After the argot of the Quartier will come the American, because that is the tongue of John Quentin and Harry Ware, and après"—one almost expected to hear the words "the deluge"—"après comes that French. That is no tongue for the people of our condition, only for poodles and Weasels."

Gartha with much appearance of conscious pride had marched with head held high to Bridget McCune, the maid whom Valery had taken for her in his father's household, and said:

"Please post my letter, dear Bridget McCune. My father says he could not improve it. In it I speak very kindly of you." The letter was dated "Ballyrogan, Ireland," and ran:

"My devoted Aleeks i am in sore distress jay perdue mon bague with which missue jon kenton seal our love, it is a ill omen it belonged to the ded, and if your ring belong to the ded she come wen the night is dark as pich and in thunder tones say where is the ring i trusted to my brither elsie macdonal say that is the spelling of it elsie macdonal is skotch. i think the weasal stoled it for of all the poor things minus virtu the weasel is she i might say it. i ask my father what gender virtu is and he says nooter because virtu belongs to no sex. i here that jon kenton is stoping with lord eldin and if he is he cant be far seprated from me his only love they tell me that la manche seprate us not la manche of engeland but la manche of ireland they endeavors to make me speak the frinch here but i tell them it is a vile tongue and should not be spoke by ladies of good blood. i am getting to like jon macdonal quite well and when i ask him if he likes me he says nat verra mooch which is the ways of men so no more from your derely loved Gartha. P.S. i ask bridget mccune how to end it an she says

snap it short aff begorra. mais il faut que je impress upon you the lost of that bague you may say to the weasel that i will send her a formal invite to the weeding but it is against the lore of the kenton famly to make bains pieds in her sauser and my husband would be disgusted and go for her tooth and nail bridget macune says that is what she would do with thim frinch begorra excuse the irish valery spelled the frinch for me he shouted it in from the garden—so b-a-i-n-s p-i-e-d-s—so i hope jon kenton will prove to be more of a gentleman than my farther and that our sons may be like him that is all that i ask of god i would ask it of the Sainte Vierge, but you know how the wimmen acts wen you want anything, your very beloved and adored Gartha p. s. i have ast briget macune and elsie macdonal to be my bridesmaids. i ast cook out of politnes briget and elsie has ascepted but cathern moriarty says she has a sister in service in amerika and she might mite be laundress in my husbans famly and it woud cry shame to her i weeped wen she refuse but she comfit me with some cake wich was most delicius and give me a great pane, it fell. the hevvy streke with sugar is what i have engage her to make for my weeding i love dere briget macune and i hope that jon kentin will love her in equal proportion i mite have married his emnunce but i am as you know devote for children, and wen i ask lord eldin if archbishops has fine stalwart sons he says none to speak of. it was a grief to me so no more from your admired and much prized Gartha p s the cook showed me how to end N'oubliez pas la bague. valery screamed that in from the garden the speling, i mean i am rejoyce jon kentin is not here to be shock."

"I couldn't have believed it if I hadn't read it myself," said Valery to Gartha in speaking of her letter. "The sentiments alone are well worth the price of admission."

"I suppose you mean worth the stamps, Valery," said Gartha.

Valery wrote a long letter also to his sister-in-law, which went in the same mail with Gartha's.

"The poor little tad has been struggling with that screed for three days," he said. "I see that you are right, and that the child should go to a good English school or she will never learn to write a decent English letter. She writes French fairly well, but her English is beyond criticism. No words will do it justice. Let me know when your interdict is abrogated, the embargo raised. Mamasha begs me to tell where you are. She seems to be afraid that you will leave or give some money to the church. Certainly, my dear Alixe, you cannot expect those good women to take you in and give you simply what will pay for your living. I know your generosity, but you must do as your heart prompts you to do, and not as Mamasha wishes in this matter. If she is going to marry Eldon, she will have gold and to spare." Valery did not add that he had sent Madame a very substantial check a few days before, that she might not be hampered in getting her wedding outfit.

There came a second draft to Madame. It was for a large sum, much larger than that usually spent for a trousseau. It was enclosed within a letter which was undated, but the envelope bore the Paris postmark.

"My dear Mamasha," it ran, "I know how hard it is to get a trousseau with very little money. I know what difficulty you had in getting mine. I send you what I think will make you feel comfortable, and I hope that it will make you happy. I hope that you and Lord Eldon will spend your honeymoon at the Abbey. I have written Charles that he is to receive

orders from you, exactly as if they were from me. If Bruno is there, or comes back, you will of course be glad to have him live in the chalet as usual. The château will be large enough for you, and if you wish to ask a house party a little later on, pray do so. I shall not be with you, but I do truly wish you every happiness. ALIXE."

XXXIII.

Quentin remained in Paris. For what he hardly knew. He could find the Archbishop, for no one was more easily found, but he had no wish to pursue Alixe; and further than that, he had no right to do so. He walked often, however, in the quarter where he knew that the Archbishop lived; and one day was fortunate enough to meet him on foot. The genial smile was as kindly as ever, the friendly hand as openly outstretched.

"Ah, Mr. Quentin, and where have you come from?"

"I have been in England, at Eldon Towers," said Quentin, "but I heard some news which brought me back to Paris."

"Not bad news, I hope." The Archbishop looked at him keenly.

"I hardly know," said Quentin. "Sometimes I think it is very bad news, again I think it may prove to be good. I wish that I had some one to tell me."

The Archbishop smiled at the young man in a friendly way.

"Were you a good son of the Church, Mr. Quentin, you would come to me perhaps and let me help you; but of course as you do not belong to us, I can hardly suggest that."

"I do not know what to do," said Quentin, looking irresolutely at the old man and then on the ground.

The Archbishop gave his hand, which he had not released, a friendly pressure.

"When you want a friend, Mr. Quentin," he said, "don't think of religious differences. Just come to me as you would have gone to your own father for help in trouble."

As Quentin walked away his mind was in a tumult with conflicting thoughts. He was so miserable that he took no note of the path which he traversed, but walked on, and suddenly became conscious that he was again near the gate from which the Archbishop had emerged. The walls of the enclosure rose high. He saw that trees grew within, and he perceived that the gray walls of a great building showed faintly through them.

He raised his eyes to the arch over the closed gate and saw that the religious emblem of the cross of Christ was placed above it. So this was some holy retreat; he might have known it. He walked around the entire square, but saw no place where the privacy and seclusion of the spot seemed broken. It was as a closed book, whose leaves he might not cut. As he proceeded on his way he saw across the street hanging upon the door of a great building the sign, "Appartements à louer." A sudden thought seized him. He entered the shaded stone entrance, and asked to see the apartments. They were au premier and au second, if Monsieur would take the trouble to mount.

"And what is there en face?" asked Quentin.

"That is the convent of——," mentioning a saint whose name was not unfamiliar to Quentin.

He examined the rooms critically, asking questions the while. "Is it a convent where the sisters take people from the outside world?" he asked.

"Oh, yes, Monsieur, and all those whom they take lodge on this side. The other side is given over to the Religious. But they will not disturb Monsieur. As Monsieur perceives there is but little of the garden that can be seen." Quentin's heart gave a great leap. He looked out of all the windows on both the first and second floors, and finding that a little corner of the convent garden was open to view from the second story apartment, he engaged it for a month, with the privilege of renewal if it pleased him.

And now began for Quentin restless days and feverish nights. He went to bed or out into the streets only when it grew so dark that he could discern nothing more in the garden. He was up with the dawn watching to see who should come there. Sometimes he saw some children playing in the garden, watched by pleasant-faced sisters; sometimes he saw the sisters walking there by threes; but he never saw the form which he sought. After he had lived in his rooms for three weeks, he again met the Archbishop. This time he was entering the gate of the convent.

"Ah, Mr. Quentin! Again in this quarter?" He fancied the tone was somewhat suspicious. "Are you living over here then?"

"I often walk here," said Quentin. "I am a great walker, you know. My hotel is on the other side." They parted, the Archbishop entering the gate, and Quentin walked on. What he had told the Archbishop was literally true, for he had not vacated his rooms at the hotel where he usually stayed when in Paris. There his letters came to him, and at night, when there was no more hope of seeing into the convent garden, he went there, or to his club, or took a spin in the Bois in an automobile, but always re-

turned to sleep, and arise with the dawn. He fancied sometimes that the very tall nun who walked in the garden might be Alixe. He wondered if she had determined to take up the conventual life. The idea drove him mad, and yet what had he to say as to the decision of another man's wife to take holy vows. He wondered whether the Archbishop would consent to receive a married woman into the conventual life; whether such separations were sanctioned by the Church. Possibly if Alixe could divide her fortune, St. Aubin would be willing to take half of it and allow her to go from him, to the peace and rest which a holy life might bring.

How many times these same thoughts went wandering through his brain he did not try to count. They and their variations were ever with him, subordinated only by the one great desire to meet Alixe, just for a moment, a few moments, face to face. At last, after a month of weary days and disturbed nights, getting no news and seeing nothing of the old occupants of the Abbey, he determined to call upon the Archbishop. Procuring his address he went to the quarter where His Grace's palace stood. When shown into the well-closed house he was all at once astonished at his own temerity. He was attacked with a species of stage fright, so to speak. Now that he was here, his knees gave way under him as he mounted the stairs. What had he come to say? He asked himself this and many a similar question as he was shown into an ante-room. It seemed that it was the Archbishop's pleasure to see personally those who wished to see him, and as Quentin entered, he found himself surrounded by several persons of both sexes. One or two shabby looking priests were there, one

dignified old father of the Church, fat and rubicund, and three poorly dressed women. A lady, richly dressed, sat near the door. She was tall and slight, and Quentin hoped at first that it might be her whom he sought; but when, on being asked by the secretary to enter the Archbishop's private room, and she rose and raised her veil, he saw the face of an old gray-haired woman.

When all those who had arrived before him had been ushered into the Archbishop's room, and left it presumably by some other door, for Quentin did not see them again, he was approached by the young priest who acted as secretary, and asked if he wished to see His Grace.

For answer he handed his card to the priest, and was at once shown into the library of the Archbishop.

"Ah! Mr. Quentin, so you have come to confess at last?" said His Grace, rising from his leather-covered chair, and laughing a little as he did so.

"I don't know exactly what I have come for, Your Grace," replied Quentin. "I am very unhappy, and I don't know where else to go."

The Archbishop gave Quentin one of his rare smiles.

"They always come to the Church, Mr. Quentin, when they are in trouble," he said, "and She opens her arms to them as if they had not scorned Her while they were in prosperity."

"I—I don't think I want to come into the church, Your Grace. I have had too Puritan an upbringing for that," said Quentin frankly. "It is you whom I wish to see—you personally."

The Archbishop looked solemn.

"Dear sir," he said, "do not say that so decidedly.

The time may come as I have said. She opens her arms to all. Now, what is the trouble? Business matters? Those are not always so readily settled. Death? That is an easy matter for the faithful sons and daughters of the Church to bear. Come! Ease your mind. What is it?"

The Archbishop laid his handsome, well-kept hand upon Quentin's arm. The episcopal ring shone out with great brilliancy. Quentin's thoughts flew back to Gartha and her naïve remark about Mamasha hanging on to the Archbishop's hand and His Grace not seeming to mind it. So many had clung to that hand: the hand ever ready to help, the hand that was perpetually outstretched to aid. The tears came to Quentin's eyes. His gaze rested upon the ring. His lips trembled into a nervous smile, as Gartha's absurd words, the Archbishop's unvarying gentleness to one who had no claim upon him, and his own troubles were inextricably mingled within his thoughts.

The Archbishop rose and went to a little glass cupboard. He took therefrom a delicate bottle and a goblet of antique shape.

He poured a dark stream from the bottle.

"There! there! my friend," he said, "drink that! It will pull you together, as you English say. Imperial Tokay from the cellars of——." His Grace mentioned the name of a well-known princely connoisseur, not as if he were vain of the fact that the present had been sent by him, but as if he wished to prove to Quentin that the wine must be of good quality. "You are run down. You look thin, Mr. Quentin; your trouble must be great. Compose yourself and then tell me all about it."

Was this the confessional of which Quentin's Puri-

tanical ancestors had talked, and railed while they talked? Was this the box where you might confess at one window, while the priest was gazing out of the other at some wedding or churchly show?

Quentin took the glass and thirstily swallowed the wine.

"You drink like a starving man," said His Grace, "as if it were meat and drink to you. Have you been fasting of late?"

"Not intentionally," said Quentin. A flush, born partly of the delicious sting of the wine, and partly from the feeling of repose which the Archbishop's presence always engendered, came over Quentin's face. He took the seat which was offered him.

"I am keeping you too long," he said; "that I know—I who have no claim. I am not of your church; not of your religion."

"I have a common brotherhood with the sorrowful," said His Grace. "They"—with a nod at the antechamber—"can wait for you as you waited for others, as others must wait for them. When the hours which I reserve are gone, they must depart and come again some other day. Well, now, what is it?"

The Archbishop leaned back in his chair, and put the tips of his fingers together; he looked at Quentin expectantly.

His visitor arose and began to pace the room. He did not speak for some moments. He swallowed once or twice, then turned and looked at the gentle old man as if to gain courage.

"There is a woman," he burst out.

His emotion, now that he had really embarked on his dread subject, mastered him. The Archbishop's face was calm. A smile seemed to underlie its sur-

face, a smile which a properly polite sympathy would not allow to break forth.

"I had not thought of that," he said. "A man of the world would at once have counselled, 'Cherchez la femme.'"

"If I could but find her," said Quentin, "if I could but discover her whereabouts! I know that I should not bring tales of the world to this quiet spot, to this holy enclosure."

The Archbishop had been regarding him calmly, waiting patiently for him to finish.

"And what else should you bring if not tales of the world? Do we not live in the world? Are we not here because of the sorrows of the world? If it were not for that world outside there, beyond the gates, of what use should we be? As it is, we are here to strive and struggle and wrestle——"

The Archbishop ceased suddenly. His tone, which had become somewhat exalted for him, was lowered.

"Go on, Mr. Quentin," he said.

"But tales like mine are so much out of your line. They are——"

The Archbishop rested his elbow on the table and his head against the palm of his hand. "Unfortunately," he said, "such tales are not rare. We hear more of them perhaps than of any other."

Quentin had been pacing the room with nervous strides. Now he suddenly halted, and absently fingered the fringe of the curtain. "I do not know why I came here," he said. "I simply couldn't help it. But now that I am here, what can you do for me? What can any one do for me? You can tell me perhaps where this woman may be found; but when I have found her, of what avail?"

"I can tell you where this woman can be found?" The Archbishop sat upright and looked searchingly at Quentin. "I? How should I know if you do not know yourself?"

"I think that you do know, Your Grace. Believe me, I have not come here for the sake of anything but that of relieving my own mind, my own heart and soul. I think that you do know. May I ask Your Grace to tell me?"

"Not until I know more about it." The Archbishop surveyed his questioner calmly.

"Not until I know more about it," he said again. "Remember, you have told me nothing as yet, Mr. Quentin; but from what I gather this is not a matter in which I should interest myself."

"I was afraid of this," said Quentin. "I told you that mine is an utterly hopeless case." He stood dejectedly against the background of the subdued light of the window, his hands hanging at his sides. He went on hurriedly. "This woman has no thought of me. I have no right to think of her."

"You have learned something when you have got thus far," said the Archbishop in a dispassionate tone.

"I have hardly more than touched her hand—not as often as I have touched your own. I have said no word of love to her, hardly of friendship. Why should you speak to me as if I were committing the unpardonable sin, Your Grace?"

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Quentin. I might have known that you would do nothing unworthy." He broke off. "But why pursue the lady if she can never be anything to you? And why come to me? Is she in my keeping? Do I know this lady? When

I told you to come if you were in trouble, I did not anticipate—I did not dream——"

"I hardly know what I wish, what I am doing; but one thing I must know, and that is whether she is happy, whether she is at peace."

The Archbishop sat quiet for the space of a minute. Before his mind's eye were passing the faces, so far as he could remember them, of the young novices who had been lately received into the church. Their youthful charms did not appeal to him except as additions to the lambfold, as was right, and their faces had not remained in his memory. Then he began to speak.

"I cannot imagine whom you can mean. There was the young daughter of the de Vallé family; she has taken the veil. There was Mademoiselle la Grange, but I think you did not know her."

"I know none of these people," said Quentin. "The woman whom I seek is married."

The Archbishop arose and stood, one hand on the table. "A woman who is married, you say? And you come to ask me, a priest of the Church, to aid you in pursuing this woman who is not, who never can be, anything to you? I had not thought it of you, Mr. Quentin."

"It is because I met you both under the same roof that I come to you."

"We know so few of the same persons, Mr. Quentin. We were a very short time in the country together, and there were only those English and American ladies, and the Baroness and Mademoiselle, besides the family."

"It is of one of that family I——"

"Oh, the dear little Madame!" smiled the Arch-

bishop with a slight tremor of the lid. "Why should you have made such a mystery about her? Her former marriage—marriages—need be no barrier. She is living in— I can easily give you her address."

"I know where Madame lives," said Quentin; "I have been to see her. It is—it is of her daughter I would ask."

At once a change passed over the Archbishop's face. It was almost imperceptible. The smile remained, but it was as if frozen into a marble mask. He took a paper-knife from the table and bent it nearly double. Then he seated himself, turned half way in his chair, leaned back, pressed his lids so closely together that the color of the ball was hardly discernible and showed only in a sharp glint of light. He thrust out his chin, turned his face sidewise toward Quentin, and said in a very slow tone, with marked emphasis:

"And what has a young man, an American, one who hardly knows her, to do with this married woman, to do with the Duchesse di Brazzia?"

Quentin sat silent. He had received a moral chill.

"You do not answer," said the Archbishop. The words came forth from his thin lips with a slow hissing sound. The sympathy between the two seemed to have been extinguished.

"I have nothing to answer," said Quentin. "There is no answer. I have nothing to do with her, God knows."

"And you would, nevertheless, force yourself on this lady?"

"God forbid!" said Quentin.

"The subject does not call for so much religious fervor," said the Archbishop dryly, in a tone which

was a mixture of plain statement and sarcasm. "Then pray what is your errand here?"

"I have told you," said Quentin. "If you know where she is, will you tell me what I ask, whether she is happy?"

"I—I—hope so," said His Grace. "If she is not, she soon will be."

"Oh, my God! Have you inveigled her, have you persuaded her—— Is she going to take the vows which will shut her forever away from the world, which will——"

"I have inveigled her, as you say, into nothing, my friend. She came, the Duchesse di Brazzia, to me voluntarily. Why, I cannot tell you. What she said to me, it is needless to inform you, I cannot disclose. And why should I to—to you? I cannot tell what her future may be. We do not know; but rest assured, Mr. Quentin, that I am as anxious for her peace of mind as you can be; rest assured that I, who have known this dear child almost all her life, am as anxious for her earthly happiness as you, an utter stranger, can be. I may tell you that I am caring for her now, and when I tell you that she has asked that I will not reveal her whereabouts to Madame Petrofsky, I am sure that you will respect that wish as I do."

"Can you doubt it?" asked Quentin. "May I ask you one thing, Your Grace?"

"You may ask me many things, Mr. Quentin. I am asked many a thing that I cannot answer. I receive many requests that I cannot grant."

"Will you ask Al—, the Duchesse di Brazzia, if she will see me? I know that I have no right," he faltered. "I know that she is not, never can be, anything to me; but if I may see her once—I do not ask

to speak to her. If you will tell me if she is happy, whether what happened at—at the Abbey has hurt her so that she is no more in love with life—if you will tell me——"

"Mr. Quentin," said the Archbishop, "I suppose you think that we priests have no sympathy because we have no feeling. Ah, there is your mistake. Just because our calling shuts us away from——" He broke off and pressed his lips together.

"Then there is hope of my seeing her?" burst in Quentin impetuously.

"Certainly," said His Grace, "if she wishes to see you, and why not? She is not a prisoner."

"Is she in this house?"

"No, Mr. Quentin. Badly as you think of us, you Protestants, I may assure you that I do not harbor women in my house. But I shall see her, and I will give her your message. I do not know you well, but I do know that, stubborn little heretic though she is, that lady's conduct must ever be above reproach."

Quentin smiled joyously at the words, "stubborn little heretic." The Archbishop saw his mistake instantly, and in a calm voice, trying to repair the breach in his walls, he continued: "I am going to see her now. If you will wait for me until I see the rest of these good people, you may drive with me as far as I go your way; and when I know myself, I will write you a line, telling you whether the Duchesse will see you or no."

Quentin, beside himself with joy, waited in a small reception room for a half hour or more. His heart was beating tumultuously, his head ringing. The pulsations of his body kept time to the words, "I shall see her, I shall see her."

At the end of the half hour the Archbishop entered hurriedly.

"Come, my friend," he said. "I have little time."

The carriage was standing at the door. The Archbishop gave an address to the coachman. It was in a very different quarter of Paris from that in which Quentin had taken up his abode. They drove for the space of ten minutes without speaking. Finally they drew up at the gates of a convent. The two men alighted.

"You must leave me here, my friend," said His Grace. "I will communicate with you in a day or two. Let my man take you to the nearest cab stand and return here for me."

Quentin surveyed the great wall with deep interest. So that was where Alixe had found refuge! Of what use his long and patient watching in the Latin Quarter. He bowed to the prelate with a new respect, and was whirled away before his old friend had been swallowed up within the gates of the conventual walls. He took a cab and returned to his hotel. Of what use to seek those dreary rooms again? They were filled, it is true, with thoughts of Alixe, but with what sad ones; with the remembrance of long hours of watching and waiting.

XXXIV.

When His Grace's carriage returned to the convent, the coachman was informed by the priest at the gate that the Archbishop was waiting at the entrance in the next street. When the carriage drove up, His Grace was standing on the opposite side of the great square, just within the gate.

"Thank you," he said, with his lovely smile, to the holy women surrounding him. "I thank you, Sister; I thank you, Mother. Another time I will stop. I merely walked through to ask of your well-being."

The gate was opened for him, and he drove off with hardly more than five minutes of his time spent within the enclosure. The carriage proceeded at once to the convent which Quentin had been watching for a month past. When the Archbishop had been admitted, he asked to see the Duchesse di Brazzia. It was not long before Alixe entered the Mother Superior's parlor. She was clad in black. Her dress was not the conventual one, but the costume of the outside world. She smiled as she gave him her hand. "You take a great deal of trouble about me, Your Grace. How good of you to come again."

"I hope that you have thought over well what I have said to you, my daughter," said the Archbishop.

"I have thought over it, I have prayed over it, Your Grace, but you must give me a little more time. I

must go back to the Abbey after Mamasha has left, and think over it there."

"After she has left?"

"Yes, I have offered her the place for her honeymoon."

The Archbishop's brow clouded. "And why back to the Abbey?" he asked.

"Because, Your Grace, my friend, the one whom I have lost, Virginia Danielli, has often talked to me there about taking the vows. Perhaps had she lived we should have taken them together. I will never go back to my husband, to Bruno, again; on that I am determined. I do not feel it to be my duty, and I do feel that, if I spare him a handsome sum, he will not require it of me. I could not, I could not. Oh, Your Grace, I could not!" Alixe began to tremble. Her face lost color. "I could not bear what I have borne, again. I—I—do not know what I should do, what it would drive me to. Do not tell me that it is my duty to return."

"I shall not tell you anything now," said His Grace. "I have no right to control you." He looked at her sadly; he saw that she was still the "stubborn little heretic" of whom he had spoken to Quentin, and he well knew that, should her husband insist upon her being restored to him, no one, the Church least of all, could prevent.

"I have nothing to say," said he. "Go back, my daughter, to the spot where our dear sister in the church implored you to join her and us. Think of her often. Go to the places where you sat together. Remember her words, and when you decide, come again to me. And now, to change the subject, I have a message for you from a friend of yours."

Alixe started visibly, and then regained her calm.

"It is not your husband, do not be afraid. Mr. Quentin, who was at the Abbey with you all for a time, he it is who wishes to see and speak with you."

Alixe said nothing for the moment. She arose and walked to the centre table, filled a glass with water and drank it, essayed once or twice to speak, and then said in a faint voice, "I do not care to see him."

"As you will, my daughter," replied the Archbishop, evidently relieved. "It shall be as you say."

"Why should I be troubled with that old life?" said Alixe. "I have done with it. I should like to see Gartha and Valery once more before——"

A beaming smile broke over the Archbishop's face. "So you have almost decided."

"Almost," whispered Alixe, "almost!" And then dropping her voice to a whisper, she said again, "Almost!"

"We must have a conference with your husband," said the Archbishop. "We can have it at the Abbey. Why should you not remain quietly here until the wed—the—the—wedding is over"—the Archbishop too seemed to feel disturbed—"and when they are away from the Abbey, go down there? Your husband can come with me, and we will arrange matters."

"I should like to go there once more," said Alixe. "I love the hills and the birds and the gardens. I should love to go there once more. I should love to sit in the ruins once again, on that old branching tree, as I sat—as I sat——"

The Archbishop arose.

"Farewell, then, my daughter, until I see you again. Do you get out to take the air as often as you should?"

"I walk in the garden," said Alixe, "but the leaves are dusty and the path is rough."

"All paths in this world are rough, my child," said the Archbishop. "Good-bye."

He took her hand in his for a moment, then dropped it, went to the door and opened it. He was nearly outside when Alixe followed swiftly after him.

"Your Grace," she said, "Your Grace, I—I—have —have changed my mind."

The Archbishop's face clouded over.

"What, so quickly?" he said. "You have no convictions. You will not enter the conventual life?"

"I have not changed my mind about that," she answered, "for it was never made up. Not about that. It is about seeing Mr. Quentin. I will see him at your house, if you give me permission. I will see him the day after to-morrow."

"At my house?" repeated the Archbishop.

"Yes, Your Grace. At your house, and I beg that you will be present."

"You may be very sure that I will be present if you ask it," said the Archbishop, a confident smile again flooding his face. And as he closed the outer door he added: "You may be very sure that I will, dear lady, in any event."

XXXV.

At about this time Mr. Hilary Valery, sometime Rastaquouère, received the following letter. It was dated Paris, and began and ended as follows:

"My dear Valery: I do wish that you would go to the Abbey and see that things are somewhat in order. There is no one there but Charles and Eugene, besides the miller and Père and Mère Montrouge, and you know what use she is. Marie Montrouge is also at the mill, but Alixe took Nanette away with her. So inconsiderate! and only God knows what has become of them. I really have not the time to attend to matters at the Abbey. What with dress-makers and milliners, and having new corsets fitted, I am worn to a shred. You might take Gartha and go over there, and welcome us when we come. Have a house party, if you like; only keep my suite of rooms for us. It will be delightful to be received by a large number of gay people. I suppose the tenants could not very well welcome us, as the place really does not belong to me. But there might be some demonstration: white favors on the horses' heads; wreaths over the road from the beginning of the Abbey wall. Something just to show that some one takes a little interest.

"Thank you for your kind draft. I will try to make it do; but you know what Raudnitz and Pacquin are. I do have a difficult time to make both ends meet. Even with no cook, and no valet, and no special maid, only a little bonne à tout faire, it is almost impossible to struggle along with my limited means. You can

take Mademoiselle down with you. She can see to Gartha and keep her from too much roaming about; she will be delighted. ['That's more than I shall be,' growled Valery between puffs of his pipe.]

"She has been weeping every morning over my gifts, and begging to go on my wedding trip with me. Now, I ask you if that is fair? She says she will go in any capacity; but of course that is absurd. It would get into the papers, and we should be the laughing stock of two continents. I am really too poor to keep Mademoiselle hanging on. If you want her for Gartha, do take her; otherwise she must seek some other position. [Valery took care to repeat parts of this interesting letter to Mademoiselle, when he saw her later. When Mademoiselle heard them, she sniffed and remarked, 'Elle crie toujours famine sur un tas de blé.']

"Now, dear Valery," the letter continued, "I have come to the serious part of my letter. I wonder if Alixe would lend me the family jewels. Not to keep, you know; just to wear at the wedding. I should hate to have Eldon's family think I was a pauper. ['Which you truly are, poor old Mamasha,' murmured Valery from clouds of smoke.]

"If I knew where Alixe was, I would write her myself. As you do not appear very anxious to see me given away again, I hope that you will do the next best thing and go down to the Abbey at once. The wedding takes place two weeks from next Thursday, and we should like to go to the Abbey as soon as possible. If you can get word from Alixe (did you ever know anything so heartless as her concealing her whereabouts from me when I have all these things on my mind?) ask her about the diamonds. I am anxious to know, and believe me, ever my dear Valery,

"Your affectionate

"Annie Petrofsky."

"P.S. If you could supplement the check just re-

ceived with one a little larger it would not be unacceptable."

"I will not have the Weasel," said Gartha. "I will have Marie Monrouge or Nanette, but I will not agree at the Weasel."

"She will have to go there, poor old thing," said Valery. "She has nowhere else to go."

"I should much prefer an English Miss," said Gartha. "Of all things I should prefer an English Miss. The Countess Blandina's twins have an English Miss. She plays the game of tennis with them and also the game of shuttledoor."

"How would you like the Baroness?" asked Valery.

"I love the Baron," said Gartha. "They say he sits in front of Maxim's and drinks his life away. What is it to drink your life away? They say it is a green thing called the absinthe."

"How would you like the Baron and the Baroness too?" said Valery.

"And John Quentin," said Gartha, "and Jan MacDonal'?"

"I'm afraid they wouldn't agree. Mr. Quentin might be jealous of Jan MacDonald."

"Just what I should most like," said Gartha.

"You are a second Mamasha," said Valery.

"Oh, Valery, you make me despise you."

"You are! You will grow up exactly like her."

"I am trying to mould myself on Alixe," said Gartha. "John Quentin said the mould was broken. What did he mean, Valery? At the same time he said I could not mould myself upon a better model."

Valery raised his eyebrows and gave a long whistle. "Quentin, too? Ha, ha!"

"Yes, isn't it a shame? Oh, but a shame! And she doesn't try at all. I asked her not to interfere, and she said she would not. Ah, mon Dieu!"

"I don't believe she has seen him since you have," said Valery, laughing. "Well, do you think you would like to go with the Weasel?"

"Is it to go with you?"

"Yes, I suppose so. The fact is, Gartha, I'm a doocid deal too good-natured."

"And if I do not go, you will go in every case?"

"Yes, but I'll take you through Paris, Gartha," said Valery, warming to his subject, for he had been at an Irish country place now for one long month. "I shall go to the Louvre, and get some of those pretty frocks."

"Like the one the Lord Eldon remarked was a dainty little robe——"

"Much prettier than that. And I shall drive you in the Bois, and we will go up in La Grande Roue de Paris, and up in the Tour Eiffel, and up in all the balloons, and——"

"Your arguments are very strong," said Gartha, "even with the Weasel at the other end. I think I will consent."

So it came about that Hilary and his little daughter started one fine morning from Ballyrogan and, duly travelling and stopping in Paris, spending a dear, delightful day with Alixe in a shopping tour for Gartha, were at the Abbey a week before Lord Eldon and Madame could possibly put in an appearance.

XXXVI.

The day after Quentin parted from the Archbishop he received a note from the priestly young secretary, saying that His Grace would be happy to see Mr. Quentin at his house on the following morning at eleven o'clock. Quentin had no idea what this meant for him, whether Alixe had consented to see him, or whether the Archbishop merely wished to tell him that she had refused his request. With all his prejudice against the priests of the Archbishop's religion, he was minded to believe that His Grace might never convey his wish to Alixe, and perhaps would merely tell him that she had declined to see him. He was restless and felt as if he were all nerves. He walked over many miles of the Paris streets that day, and finally took an automobile and had a spin away to St. Germain, through Versailles and the forest of Marly. He ate his dinner on the terrace, and gazed afar at the steeples of St. Denis, where the kings of France are buried, and remembered as he stood there the anecdote of Louis the Fourteenth, who would never inhabit St. Germain because of that reminder of death which was ever in his view. When it was so dark that he could hardly see the road, he started back to Paris. His brake gave out, and he walked almost all the way, leaving his machine at a shop, where he had knocked up the sleepy proprietor. He

would not have done so careless a thing ordinarily, but he was living in a dream, and such actions showed him later how widely he had departed from his ordinary custom. In a dazed and wondering state he reached his rooms, bathed, ate some food, and then threw himself down to sleep; but he was, notwithstanding his tiresome night, early wide awake, dressing and looking at the clock with every passing moment. At last he allowed himself to descend the stairs and call for a cab. It was ten minutes to eleven.

Quentin rang the Archbishop's bell, and was ushered into a different reception room from the one where he had sat on the last visit. He was its only occupant. Almost at once the young secretary came in and said:

"This way, Monsieur," and led him into the library. The first object that he saw was a tall figure standing by the window, the figure of a woman. She was clothed in black, and wore a veil. She was thinner than when he saw her last, and had a careworn look which was new to her. He advanced, and she stretched out her hand.

"How do you do, Mr. Quentin? I am very glad to see you."

The tone was so coldly kind, and the words so commonplace, that Quentin was conscious of a severe feeling of disappointment.

"Ah, Mr. Quentin, how do you do?" They were His Grace's cheery tones. There was no closing of the eyelids now, no sarcasm in the pleasant voice. The Archbishop spoke as one who stands on firm ground, as one who is entrenched in a position from which nothing can dislodge him.

"Take a seat, Mr. Quentin; be seated, Duchesse.

It is some time since we three met at the Abbaye de Bref."

Alixe took the chair His Grace offered her, and Quentin seated himself between the two. A thought flashed through his mind that this should ever be his position, could he manage it, now and always, between the two. There would he stand and there would he fight until he found that she herself was willingly fighting against him and had firmly arrayed herself upon the other side.

"Have you been there lately, Mr. Quentin?" asked Alixe, looking up at him quickly. He was gazing at the rope of silver beads and the cross set with amethysts that hung downward among the folds of her dress. When last he had seen the symbol it was but the last gift of a beloved friend. It possessed a different significance now.

He raised his eyes from the splendid ornament. He could not but feel how every accessory which this woman possessed, instead of adding to her charm, was itself made the more attractive because worn by her.

"No," said Quentin, "I have been over in England. I saw Miss Spencer at Eldon Towers."

"Ah, you have been there! And how was Lady Alfred? And dear Lord Eldon! I need not ask. I believe he is happy; they are both happy, I hope, Mamasha and he. Shall you attend the wedding, Mr. Quentin?"

"I have not been asked. But I am invited by Valery to go to the Abbey for a house party soon. Are you coming?"

"No," said Alixe, "I have told them that I cannot come. I wish them every happiness, as you must

know, but I cannot mix with the world again." The Archbishop sat leaning back in his chair, smiling.

"How can you leave the world?" asked Quentin.

The Archbishop frowned slightly and shifted his position. He clasped his fingers together, resting them under and against his white upper teeth, and fixed a level gaze on Quentin.

"I think that I shall be able to," said Alixe, with a bright look at the Archbishop. Her hand unconsciously sought the cross. She held it as she spoke. "God and His Grace helping me. There is one obstacle only, and we hope to overcome that, do we not, Your Grace?"

"We do, my dear daughter, we do."

"And have you so quickly changed your faith, the faith of your fathers?" asked Quentin. "Have you had time to learn all their lessons by rote?"

The Archbishop frowned, but the frown was a secure one. He looked into the face of Alixe as she smiled back at Quentin, as if he were certain what her argument would be. Her lip was tremulous, but she spoke without a tremor in her voice.

"I have learned nothing by rote. They have taught me nothing except by their example. I see holy lives all around me. All that I crave is peace. His Grace promises me peace."

"Yes, I promise you peace," said the Archbishop, "in—in time."

"I hoped that you would give me your address that I might see you sometimes," said Quentin. "I have taken rooms close to the convent of St. Saviour's. I can look into the little corner of the garden. I thought I might see you there." Both Alixe and the Archbishop had started at these words. "I knew that it

was no affair of mine, your going away like this; but I feared that—you must pardon me, Your Grace, I am perhaps prejudiced—I was afraid that you were being coerced against your will."

"Oh, no, no!" said Alixe. She turned on him a smile full of confidence in her new surroundings.

"I found that you were not at that convent, because the Archbishop took me to another quite on the other side of Paris, when he went to see you——"

Alixe raised her brows almost imperceptibly at her old friend. He shook his head faintly at her, as if to say, "All's fair in war."

"I hoped that you would let me see you sometimes," repeated Quentin nervously.

"What good would that do, Mr. Quentin? You and I have nothing in common. My husband is the only man to whom I should go for advice unless I appeal to a father of the Church, and my husband's permission I hope to obtain ere long. That is the only impediment to my entering a sisterhood."

Quentin had risen and stood with his arms folded.

"The only impediment!" he repeated.

Alixe arose and the Archbishop also.

"And now good-by," said Alixe. "It is good-by for all time." There was the suspicion of a tear in her voice. She coughed and quickly controlled herself. "I am fond of my friends, Mr. Quentin, and I connect you with my dear Abbey. I often think of my happy days there, and of the friends whom I met there and of the ones—the one I have lost. I think that you would have been a friend to me, too, could I have remained in the world; but, believe me, I am doing the best thing for us all." Alixe looked downward, ceased suddenly, and put her hand to her breast

with an exclamation of dismay. Quentin, who feared that she was ill, sprang forward, but saw at once that from the folds of her dress there hung a tiny chain whose catch was loose. She was holding it in her fingers, looking at the hanging ends.

"What is it, my dear?"

"I have dropped something, Your Grace. Mr. Quentin, promise me you will not move, promise! Dear Archbishop, do not take a step, I implore you. You will crush it. It is an ornament I wear in memory of a friend." Alixe was down on her knees searching the floor.

"Virginia Danielli," whispered the Archbishop to Quentin, "a great factor in her memory for me and against you!" Alixe was searching everywhere, groping, groping. Slowly rising at last, she stood, peering beneath sofas and chairs.

"I will have it found, and send it to you," said His Grace.

"No, dear Archbishop, no!" she answered. "I must have it before I go away."

Suddenly from a far corner Quentin perceived the shining of a ray of light. He started toward it, but the older man was before him. Together they stooped, and Quentin, out of respect to the Archbishop, allowed him to pick up the gem. As His Grace advanced toward Alixe she almost snatched the ring from his hand, so anxious did she seem to regain possession of it.

"You must greatly prize it," said he; "allow me to aid you"; but she had closed her fingers upon the treasure, and was pushing it within the palm of her black glove.

"It—it—is something of Gartha's," said Alixe. "She lost it in—in—my room—one day."

"And you are keeping it to restore to her?"

"Yes—if—she—asks it."

Alixe hurriedly pushed open the door. "Good-by, dear Archbishop; good-by, Mr. Quentin." Her trailing gown swept through the opening; so swift was her flight that the door had closed upon her before the two men could realize that she was gone.

"Ah, that is so like her. That is her nature. So loving and faithful," said the placid old man. "The little child's ring! She was wearing it around her throat beneath her gown. You saw where the chain had escaped and hung loose—" and then breaking off— "You see how hopeless it all is, Mr. Quentin. How little she cares to take up her earthly life again. I think she is dead to all earthly friendships, except, perhaps, the purest of loves, and that for little Gartha. She intends, as you heard her say, to come into the Church and enter a sisterhood if her husband will give his permission. And you see how worse than foolish it would be for her to keep up even a semblance of friendship with a young man like yourself. Such friendships lead to no good. You see that, do you not?"

"Yes, I see," said Quentin. His tone was so joyous that the Archbishop raised his eyes in astonishment. The color had come to the young man's face, the smile to his lip. There was a light in his eye that had not been there for many a day. "I see, Your Grace, I see," he repeated.

For had he not seen and recognized the lost charm for which Alixe had searched so anxiously? The charm which she had worn about her neck close to her heart, the ring which he had given Gartha?

"And now, my young friend, good-by. Give up

this foolish sentiment. Go home and marry one of your estimable American girls, they are all beautiful and they are all rich, and do not try to meddle with foreign duchesses. Above all things, do not imagine for a moment that, when once the Church has her grasp upon such a woman as that, you, puny worldling that you are, can change her mind."

"I thank you for your goodness, Your Grace," said Quentin. "You have put new life in me. And whether that woman immures herself within one of your cloisters or no, whether she takes the veil or returns to the world, I shall ever be the happier for what has passed here to-day. I thank you. Good-by."

"That is rather a serious quantity to reckon with," said the Archbishop as he touched his bell; "a very stubborn, determined character. But he can do nothing; the fates, Alixe, and I are against him. Against such a combination who can stand?" And then to his secretary, "Send in the next visitor."

XXXVII.

Quentin returned to his hotel, his heart singing for joy. He sat thinking deeply most of the afternoon, going over and over again in his mind the scenes at the Archbishop's. At last, about four o'clock, he decided to go to the apartment on the Rive Gauche and give notice to the proprietor that after the month was up he should not need the rooms. Why should he remain in that quarter of the town if Alixe was far removed from him in another? When he arrived, the proprietor was not at home, but Quentin nevertheless went up to his apartments. He did not drag himself up the circular stairs with slow and lagging step, but sprang like a boy off for a holiday. He unlocked his door and went in. The rooms looked bright and sunny, and evidently had been well cared for during the days when he had not thought it necessary to visit them. He disliked the idea of giving them up, for although he felt certain that Alixe was in that other religious house, far removed from him across the river, still this was the place where he had sat and thought of her, dreamed of her; and everything in the room reminded him of her, for as he had looked at the different objects about him, his thoughts had ever been of Alixe in the different phases in which he had seen her. Here was the little white hat, a pen-wiper, which he had bought because it reminded him of the Russian hat which she had always worn at the

Abbey. There was a tiny print of a church, whose trees peered above the ruined walls, and brought to mind the place where he had spent a few blissful days. There, hanging opposite his couch, was the picture cut from an illustrated paper, of a tall and lovely woman dressed in black, a rope of beads around her waist, in her hand a crucifix. This vision was in his mind's eye as he pushed through the open window, and went out upon the little balcony. He walked along to the further corner, which was screened by fir trees and plants; and looking over their tops into the garden, he saw the woman of whom he was thinking. She was sitting on a bench, her small black hat was on her knee. She was looking at her companion, whom Quentin perceived at a glance to be the Archbishop. He seemed to be talking earnestly, and she was listening with deep attention.

Quentin could hardly restrain himself from calling across the noisy street, "So you thought to fool me, Your Grace. But I have found you out!" But even had he called, his voice could not have carried above the din of the moving vehicles; and he must content himself with gazing and gazing upon the pair, rather on the woman sitting in the garden below. His Grace and Alixe remained for a quarter hour, and then he rose. She gave him her hand, and he raised the other above her head as if in blessing. The gesture struck a chill to Quentin's heart. It seemed that she must have finally promised that which the Archbishop had asked of her. Then they turned. Alixe picked up her hat, which had fallen to the ground, and he lost sight of them beneath the arching trees of the garden.

It was but the work of a moment for Quentin to

awake from his daze, run in through the window, seize his hat, fling out of the room, and descend the stairs. He sprang downward with boyish leaps and jumps. As he came into the street he was surprised to see how the dusk was creeping on. He hurried along, hoping to meet the Archbishop at the convent gate. The pavement was wellnigh bare of pedestrians; but as he hastened, some one was there ahead of him, some one whose shabby black, so familiar and hateful to his eye, told him that it was Halle, the dishonored priest. He was waiting at the corner of the street, his body hidden by the angle of the wall, his head just peering around the corner. Danger to the Archbishop was Quentin's first thought. Had he not been really attracted by this delightful old prelate, still his first thought would have been to protect him from a man whom he considered bad enough to commit any dark deed; but he was fond of the Archbishop, notwithstanding their disagreements, and he was not fond of Robert Halle. He determined in a twinkling to obstruct the priest's plans and warn the Archbishop. He came up behind Halle, and walking round in front of him, he said, "Ah, Father Halle, waiting to see the Archbishop?"

Halle started at the unexpected voice coming so suddenly out of the dusk, and turned on Quentin with a face livid with either fear or rage, perhaps a combination of both. His air of surprise was natural, but not the tone with which he greeted the newcomer.

"Ah, Mr. Quentin," he said, "I did not expect to see you here."

"No," said Quentin, "I don't suppose you did. You know His Grace is inside, do you not?"

"His Grace?" Halle put on an air of surprise.

"Perhaps it will not be difficult for you to imagine, Mr. Quentin, that the Archbishop, after his injustice and cruelty to me, is the last man in all Paris whom I wish to see."

"Be careful, then, how you appear to wish to see him, Mr. Halle," said Quentin, and walked onward to where His Grace was just issuing from the gateway. As he approached the Archbishop, Halle slunk back around the corner and disappeared in the night.

Quentin advanced into the ray of the lamp. At first the old man did not recognize the younger one, but as Quentin came out under the faint light of the lantern which hung above the gate, the Archbishop started.

"Ha, Mr. Quentin! Again in this quarter? Now tell me, I beg of you, what is your interest over here on the Rive Gauche?"

"I told you before, Your Grace, but that is not what I wish to speak of now. May I get into your carriage with you and ride a little way?"

The Archbishop, unaccustomed to so much freedom from younger men, bowed coldly and entered his carriage. "Get in, Mr. Quentin," he said, courteously giving his self-invited guest the seat upon his right. "I can take you but a short distance. I must stop in the Boulevard St. Germain."

As the horses started Quentin turned to the Archbishop.

"Have you seen that man Halle lately, Your Grace?"

"Halle? No! You mean the priest? I have never seen him since I denounced him. I suppose you met him at the Abbey. I hear that he was there and that the owner is very stubborn about receiving him there. That is almost the only topic on which we

disagree at present. She imagines him wronged, that circumstances are against him, that he will be able to clear himself some day. It was not so much the money that he took, though that was a considerable sum; but it was that dreadful deed, stealing from the Church. Why, Mr. Quentin, if Halle had robbed us of the vessels of the sacrament I should hardly have been more shocked."

"I have reason to think that he has no love for you, Your Grace."

"Of that I am well aware," said the Archbishop sadly, "but the poor wretch cannot harm me. My position in the matter and my proofs are too well known to those in authority."

"He can do harm to your person, Your Grace. That is why I asked to drive with you a little way. I had just stumbled upon him. He was lurking past the corner of the wall back there in the side street. He was, I think, watching for your exit from——"

"Oh, no! Mr. Quentin," said the Archbishop, smiling incredulously. "Badly as I think of him, I cannot believe that a man who has once been a priest of the Church would stoop to commit such a crime. He may have wanted to speak to me. He cannot come to my house. My servants have had orders not to allow him to enter. He had his day and his trial. Perhaps he thought this his only chance of meeting me. Should he write and make an appointment, I would see him once more, if only to tell him how hopeless these appeals are. I offered, in the first place, to send him to a brotherhood, one of the remote, silent brotherhoods, where no word is spoken. That he would have none of. He wishes to be again an honored priest, officiating in a church here in Paris. This I

was not willing that he should be, and what I ask is listened to by those who decide such matters. I cannot consider it a sincere repentance, if he is not willing to wear out his life in whatever part of our Master's work the Church sets for him to do. But that he is willing to play the part of a criminal, I should not be willing to believe."

Quentin could but feel that the Archbishop was too trusting. His anxiety had been added to by the remembrance of Halle's sudden hiding of his hand behind him. He would have turned and grappled with the priest to discover what he had thus secreted, but for hearing the gate open, and wishing to warn the Archbishop before he could drive away.

"I will not argue longer in that direction, Your Grace," said Quentin; "but if you have time to listen, let me tell you my experience with this precious priest." Whereupon he began to relate to the prelate all that he knew of Halle, his endeavor to frighten him (Quentin) out of the chalet rooms, the scene with St. Aubin and the workman under the wall at night, and his final encounter with Halle on the hilltop. The Archbishop listened attentively. When Quentin had finished, he said, "You should have left the châlet, I think, as they requested. I cannot imagine why he should be so angry with you, even if he thought you were spying on him and his inventions. It sounds all very absurd and ridiculous, not to say rude and ill-bred; but I can see nothing criminal in it. I suppose, if they carry out their tests satisfactorily, St. Aubin will give Halle some sort of percentage——"

"For doing his dirty work for him," burst in Quentin.

"Isn't that a rather strong expression, Mr. Quentin?" returned the Archbishop mildly. "What proof have you that there is any such thing as what you call 'dirty work' about their project?"

"Believe me, Your Grace," said Quentin earnestly, "there is something wrong when men try to frighten away, by such childish methods, a guest and stranger from the rooms which have been assigned him by his hostess."

The carriage drew up at the pavement. "Here is my destination," said the Archbishop. He sat for a moment, his hand on the catch of the door, and turned toward Quentin.

"I thank you much, Mr. Quentin, for your intention to be kind. Whether you are mistaken in your surmises or no, you meant to do me a favor, and believe me, I fully appreciate it. But do not fear for me. I am not afraid of Robert Halle or forty thousand unfrocked priests, if there could be a possibility of such a number, which God forbid! Such cases as his are rare. That makes them perhaps, in one way, all the more distressing. We are not accustomed to such a display of cupidity, and that is the reason—" the Archbishop released the handle and turned toward Quentin still further—"that is the reason why it has seemed so strange. Halle had no reason to steal. He was provided for, as are all of our clergy. He had no need of money. That is the only thing that I cannot understand about the matter."

"The money was wanted to put into these so-called inventions," said Quentin.

"St. Aubin had an abundance," said the Archbishop; "that was a most foolish thing, taking his wife's money to waste on these expensive experiments."

"Halle may have wished to add his share," said Quentin. "What the cause may be, I do not know; but that pair of worthies are hand in glove in whatever schemes they are concocting. Of that I saw enough to feel sure. I really think Halle the better man of the two."

The Archbishop smiled indulgently.

"A little prejudice, my friend, a little prejudice perhaps. We all have our prejudices, you know. We cannot always account for our prejudices." He opened the door.

"Let me go with you to the house door, Your Grace."

The Archbishop laid his hand on Quentin's. "I thank you from the bottom of my heart, and none the less because I know how utterly foolish are your fears for me. Even had Halle a plan to injure me, he could not have reached this place, so remote from where you saw him, by this time. Do not fear for me, my friend. Take my carriage and drive to your hotel; then send it back for me. Good-by. I did not expect to see you so soon again. You know you bid me an heroic and an eternal farewell this morning; but man proposes, and it is God who disposes of us all for His own great ends."

With these last words the Archbishop strode across the pavement, and when he was well within the door, Quentin told the coachman where to take him. All the way back to his hotel he was thinking of the last turn of the Archbishop's head and the rare and kindly look with which he bowed him a farewell.

XXXVIII.

Valery and Gartha had now been at the Abbey for about a week. Alixe heard from Valery almost every day. His letters were full of moanings about the desolateness of the place.

"It is no more as it was, Alixe," he said. "I miss you, and the English girls, and Quentin, and dear old Mamasha. She does make a place seem so comfortable, if you only rub her the right way. How she does purr and lick her pretty paws. I hope Eldon will succeed in putting butter on them. I suspect the butter will be in the shape of a great many handsome rings. I went into Spaulding's to buy Gartha a ring, in the place of one which she says she lost in your room at the Abbey, and whom should I behold but Mamasha looking at a necklace. I stood behind a vase, and I heard the poor little soul actually bargaining for the rent of it, just for the wedding! The truth is, Alixe, she wrote me some time ago, asking that I would try to get you to let her wear the Duke's diamonds just for that day, and I forgot all about it. Where are they? Can I get them if I come to Paris? If you will give me an order for them, I will send them to her, first obtaining a paper signed by her that they are to be returned in good condition the day after the wedding. Dear little Mamasha! You know she doesn't always know the difference between meum and tuum, and the necklace wouldn't either after it had been in her possession for a few decades. I sent her another draft the other day. Don't send any more. She has all that a respectable widow woman

of her years should require. Let Eldon do the rest. Really, Mamasha does press the button somewhat often.

"Gartha longs to see you. She talks always of that rare day in Paris when you went about shopping with us, and we lunched at Armenonville. Why can't you be a Christian, Alixe, give up your fads, and come here for the house party? I'll send you a telegram some day that will frighten you out of your senses, and you will come before you know it.

"Gartha's love and mine.

"Ever yours,

VALERY.

"P.S.—Mademoiselle is here pulling as long a face as one with a face of the shape of hers can. She says that she never expected to live at the Abbey without company, but is somewhat cheered when I tell her that we are to have a regular house party next week. Gartha will have nothing to say to her. She now calls her the cacomistle, having seen one of those animals in the Zoo in London. Gartha is down at the mill all day long, or wandering round the place alone. I cannot play lady's maid or child's nurse at my age. The truth is, I'm too good-natured for this world. When I'm dead, I should be canonized. Don't you think it would be somewhat more consistent in you to come here and look after your sister's child, than to be hobnobbing with the Religious in Paris, no matter how fascinating they may be? Allaire left Gartha to you, you know, Alixe; and really I can do nothing with her. The only persons to whom she will speak are Marie and Pierre Monrouge. What she does at the mill I don't know, but I expect to hear that she has been ground up in the wheel, or drowned in the pond, or has fallen off the wall, or out of the hay loft——"

There was a hurried knock at the door.

"Come in," called Alixe.

The sister who entered, one of the serving sisters, had in her hand a blue envelope. "A message, Madame," she said.

Alixe took the envelope from the sister, and tore it open. Her fingers trembled. Where and from what direction would it strike?

"Come at once," it ran. "Gartha is injured."

At first, every trace of color left her cheek. She went to the nail where hung her black bonnet and took it down. She looked into her purse to see if she had money, she sought for her gloves and a plain wrap, and then, suddenly, she burst into a merry laugh. The sister, who waited to see if there was any answer, looked up astonished. So merry a laugh she had not heard for many a long day.

"Thank you, you may go," said Alixe; "it is nothing."

She picked up Valery's letter from where it had fallen on the floor, and with a smile on her face began to read it over. When she came to the line which read, "I'll send you a telegram some day that will frighten you out of your senses," she laughed again.

"For shame, Valery," she cried aloud, "for shame, to frighten me so about the child."

She finished Valery's letter, then put her bonnet and gloves away. Then she took her garden hat and went out to the seat in the corner of the enclosure.

Alixe sat there thinking. All that had passed in the last few days came back to her. She thought often of Quentin, of his wish that she should be happy. She remembered, and not for the first time, what he said about taking an apartment in the same street, where he could watch her, and, suddenly, she looked upward. There, across the street behind the

firs and flowers, stood Quentin himself. He smiled and waved his hand. She smiled back at him, but shook her head and turned away. The sister was coming toward her with a second envelope.

Alixe ran toward the messenger and tore open the telegram, and this time she did not laugh.

"Come, for God's sake," it ran. "Gartha has been burned. She may not live to see you. She asks for you constantly."

With hurried step Alixe sought the Mother Superior, showed her the message, explained the cause of her ignoring the first one, wrote an answer to be sent, and was driving to the station ten minutes after the second message had been read. She was fortunate in finding a train starting in a few moments. She was glad when she found that none had been despatched since she received the first telegram. Alixe took her seat, impatient and nervous. The two hours and a half seemed like two years. She wondered what it could be. Valery had said that Gartha was always at the mill. Had there, by chance, been a fire at the mill? Had the house burned down, and the child, her sister's little Gartha, been crushed by falling walls? Every horror that anxious love could conjure up to a terrified soul came rushing to her distracted mind. When the train stopped at some way station and lost time, Alixe felt as if she should go mad.

"What are we stopping for?" she asked the guard. "What are all these delays?"

The guard, ignorant, as usual, on the smaller roads in France, and a fatalist, as on most others, smiled subserviently, shrugged his shoulders, thrust the palms of his hands outward, and lounged slowly down the track.

When at last Alixe reached the little station in the valley, she found Pierre Monrouge awaiting her. She took her seat in the brougham with trembling limbs.

"What is it, Pierre Monrouge?" she asked. "Is the house burned? Is the mill burned? Where were you all that you could not attend to Mademoiselle Gartha?"

"Mademoiselle Gartha will obey no one but the Duchesse, that the Duchesse knows," said Pierre Monrouge respectfully.

Ah! Alixe knew but too well that, had she been with Gartha, the horror, whatever it was, might not have happened. Here her duty lay—not back there in Paris, away from all she loved.

"It was in the chalet, Madame," and nothing more could be got out of Pierre Monrouge. That the fire had been in the chalet was very plain to Alixe, for as they passed it by, she saw that the outer walls had partly fallen in, and that the smoking bricks lay upon the road. The horses neighed and snorted, but the workmen who were clearing away the débris seized the bridle and led them clear, and Alixe was at the gate.

Valery met her as it opened.

"Where is she?" asked Alixe.

"In your room. She would be taken nowhere else."

Alixe flew across the terrace, through the salon, and up the stairs. She waited at the door of her chamber, gathering courage to enter.

"I heard you," called a piping voice; "the Weasel has just gone down the other way."

Alixe passed through into her own great chamber. There in the centre of the bed, the one which Miss

Spencer had likened to the Great Bed of Ware, was a bundle of white. Alixe bent over it and kissed it, her tears falling fast.

"Oh, my little Gartha! And I away from you!"

"Ah! nom de Dieu, you certainly ought to have been here, Alixe. You know very well that I will mind no one but you. Not Valery always. But I cannot blame you leading your gay life in Paris! I am sorry to take you away from it, Alixe," Gartha gave a long sigh, Alixe a longer one; "but Valery says this is your plain duty."

"Where does it hurt you, darling?"

"Well, pretty much all over. The reason you can't see my face is that they have bound me up. I do not know when they did it. They put something to my nose; it was lovely, but of an odor! Oh, but of an odor! or they should not have did it," Gartha spoke slowly, she was tired. "Have—you--come—to stay?"

"Yes, yes, my darling, to stay! To stay forever!"

"Did my father, did Valery esplain to you, Alixe?"

"Nc, darling, I hardly saw him. I came directly up to you. But you must not talk so much. Your father will tell me later."

"I must tell you a little," said Gartha in a weak voice. "You see I will mind no one but you. My little mamma gave me to you, and when the Weasel, I mean the cacomistle, said, 'Do not!' I did it. Je m'en bats l'œil."

Alixe was laughing and crying together.

"Well, one fine day I went where I had been forbidden to go."

"One day?"

"Oh! Alixe, do not stories begin always that way. It was this morning, but I cannot help that—I went

to my Uncle Bruno's rooms. Oh, how I hate my Uncle Bruno! I have not been there since—since, oh, well, quand j'etais gosse."

Alixe smiled indulgently at the forbidden argot.

"Well, you went into your Uncle Bruno's rooms. How did you get in, by the way?"

"Marie Monrouge had been clean, clean—le nettoyage, you know, Alixe. Uncle Bruno wrote to her to while no one was here. It seems that he did not understand that Mamasha would marry with the Lord Eldon and all of us was coming, and nat—naturally I went in with Marie Monrouge."

"Yes, it was very natural," said Alixe.

"Eh bien! while Marie Monrouge was in the further room, au fond, you know, Alixe, suddenly I saw a cunning little box, but of the cunningest. I opened it——"

"Poor little Pandora!" said Valery's voice. He came and stood at the foot of the bed.

"I am tired, let—Valery—tell——"

"I will tell Alixe down-stairs." Valery put his finger on his lip, and soon there was quiet in the room, hardly broken by Gartha's soft breathing.

When Alixe could withdraw her fingers from Gartha's, she went away with Valery, to learn how the little girl had started some machinery in motion by turning a small lever. Then, hearing an ominous ticking and buzzing, she became frightened, and ran toward the door. She was on the landing when the explosion took place, and because of that probably escaped death. Marie Monrouge was in the third chamber, but beyond being terribly frightened by the falling of bricks, she was taken out unhurt.

Alixe now took upon herself all the care of the child.

She allowed the trained nurse to do only what she herself was not competent to do. After a few days the physician sent for from Paris to consult with the doctor from the hospital in the village, said that he felt sure that Gartha would recover the use of her limbs and be as she was before. There would be scars, but not on her face.

On the sixth day of Alixe's presence at the Abbey, Gartha had the bandage removed from her face. She was lying back on the pillows, and as usual, when not too tired, was talking.

"Alixe, did you ever hear of any one being married on her bed of death, on her lit de mort?"

"I do not know," said Alixe; "yes, I believe I have."

"Bien! the Weasel told me of such a thing. Now will you do a thing that shall please me?"

"Yes, dear, what is it?"

"Put on your halo, Sainte Vierge."

"Oh, Gartha! Do not say such things."

"The Russian hat! The Russian hat! I will have you in the Russian hat. The Weasel has read me a tale once about a lady who was dying, and she asked to be married to her lover on her bed of death. Have you gone for the halo, Alixe?"

"Yes, Gartha, I have it on," said Alixe, coming back to the bedside.

"You must excuse me," said Gartha, "my eyesight is a little impaired. That is what the English doctor from Paris said it would be—" imitating the pompous tone of that physician—"'but for a time, dear little mademoiselle, only for a time.' She asked to be married (the lady, I mean) with her lover on her lit de mort," said Gartha, resuming her narrative. "He

did not like her very much, that is bad when one likes not one's femme, but as she would be dead and gone in a few short days, he consents. Eh bien! The priests came, and they bring all the necessary things, I do not know what they are, and the lover stood up by the lady's bed, and they were married fast and firm, when suddenly, lo, and behold! sapristi! if you believe, that lady begins to improve. Every morning when the lover, now the husban', comes to the door, and whines, 'How is my dear wife this morning?' the nurse answers, 'She is much improved, Monsieur. Galloping at a pace, oh, but a pace! toward the health.'

"Finally, one fatal day, she conceives the idea of getting up and standing behind the door. So up comes the mari and says, 'How is my dear wife this morning?' when suddenly out she springs to him, saying, 'My dear lover, I am well!' With this the husban' was so surprise that, sapristi! down he drops dead from mal atroce, and the wife lives happy ever after."

Alixe and Valery were laughing at the termination of this sad story, when Gartha began to speak again.

"Do not laugh or make merry at my espense, my dear aunt and father. I think I am, myself, near death. So I beg of you to call my faithful servants round me and send for John Quentin to marry me, that we may look our last on the hillside where he licked Robert Halle, and I may rest easy in my grave."

The tears were running down Valery's face, but not from grief. "How they do stuff children with that stilted nonsense," he said. "But suppose you should get well, Gartha, what would John Quentin do then?"

"That is just the very greates' trouble," said Gar-

tha earnestly. "If I was sure that I was indeed struck with death, that I had the final coup, I would have you send for him, but as I am not quite certain, I might get well and it would be—a—embarrassment of him. It might be a embarrassment de moi aussi, Valery. And it would embarrass Jan McDonal' still the more. I have promise to marry Jan McDonal'. I would send for him now, but he could not get here in time, and as long as I am struck with death, it makes but little matter who the man may be."

"Gartha, you will be the death of me!" shouted Valery. "I think I'll run up to Paris to-morrow. I warned off the Eldons, and you may be sure dear old Mamasha doesn't want any death-bed scenes, but I might bring Quentin down."

"I hope that you will do nothing of the kind," said Alixe; "we are not ready for visitors, Valery, and I am in no state to see any one."

"Do you really think I shall get well?" asked Gartha in a disappointed tone. "Because if you are not quite, quite sure, sur et certain, you might ask John Quentin to come back with you, and his Emnunce, to commit the services."

XXXIX.

So it came about that Alixe and Gartha were left alone. Alixe had moved the child to a small couch where she could care for her more easily. At night the great iron doors of the Abbess's room were double locked and bolted, and Alixe felt secure as in a fortress.

It was on the night that Valery had left the Abbey. Alixe was in her bed; Gartha asleep. Suddenly, out of the stillness of the night, there came a knocking on the iron door. Alixe opened to find Marie Monrouge standing there, her eyes staring wide.

"Oh, Madame," she said, "Father Halle is here, and he says that he must see you."

Alixe had not time to more than throw on her dressing gown, before Halle was at the door also. He pushed into the room, crying, "Save me, Alixe! Save me!"

"Hush!" said Alixe sternly. "Do you not know? Can you not see?" She pointed toward Gartha's bed. The child stirred uneasily in her sleep. "That is what you and Bruno have brought her to. I know not how! I do not ask, but the least you can do——"

As Alixe spoke there was a loud ringing at the outer gate, the door within the wall. Halle sank down upon the floor, clinging to Alixe's robe. "Oh, rescue me! Rescue me!" he cried. He shook, he trembled. It was plain he was in a state of abject terror.

"Save you! And from what?"

"Open! Open in the name of the law!" The shout came clear and distinct from beyond the gate.

"Who are those that come at this time of the night?" asked Alixe of Halle. "Have they come here for you?"

"They are the officers of the law. Oh, save me, I beg of you! Save me, Alixe! If not for the love that I have ever borne you, then for the sake of our life-long friendship."

"Be silent!" said Alixe sternly. "Marie Monrouge" (to the trembling maid), "who saw this" (a motion of the head toward the cringing figure), "this priest come in here?"

"No one, Madame. He came from the fields——"

"I have been in hiding all day. I climbed into the loft. I heard the men talking, they said it had been discovered——"

"What had been discovered? Marie Monrouge, go down and keep out of the way! Go to your mother. If any one asks you if you have seen Father Halle—say—avoid answering. In fact, Marie Monrouge, you had better keep quite out of the way, for I would not have you tell a falsehood, even for Father Halle."

Marie Monrouge slipped down the stairs, crossed the salon, and hid her quaking form within the ruins, where she heard again, and yet a third time, the demand, "Open! open! in the name of the law!"

"What had they discovered?" Alixe repeated the question to the priest.

"The—the Archbishop's death. Had you not? Oh, God!" for she had fallen upon the floor.

She quickly recovered herself. "Oh, my dear

Archbishop!" she cried aloud. "Dead! Dead! My dear Archbishop! And they suspect you? Poor Robert! Why not go out and face them?" the tears were flooding Alixe's face. "And they say that you are guilty? Oh, my dear Archbishop, my dear old friend!"

But Halle was cringing and crawling at her feet.

"Oh, I cannot, I cannot! Close the door, I beg, I beg of you. They will never look for me here."

"No," said Alixe, "they will never look for you here."

She looked down at him through blinding tears.

"Ouvrez! ouvrez! au nom de la loi!"

Through the open window Alixe heard the bolts withdrawn and the great gate flung wide. Lights flashed on the terrace, she caught sounds of interrogations, and denials, then she heard the officers enter the château and the tramping of footsteps as they searched the lower rooms. Gartha moved in her sleep. Alixe ran to her. "Here, Sweet!" she said, and raising the child upon her arm, she gave her a sleeping potion one hour too early. Gartha sank back with a sigh.

"I thought I saw Robert Halle," she muttered. "You know how I hate Robert Halle—only a—lit—little—less than—my—Uncle—Bruno."

"We must lock the door, Alixe; we must make fast the door."

Alixe turned and again surveyed the black figure prostrate before her. The man was unshorn and unkempt. His black robe was muddy, his sandals were covered with the loam of the fields. She went to the iron door and closed it, then she stood and listened. She heard the search going on below.

"Is it certain that he is dead?" she asked.

"Yes," said Halle.

"How do you know?"

"The street gamins, the newsboys, were crying it in Paris before I left."

"When was it?"

"In the night some time."

"How do you know?"

The priest shuddered and put his hands before his face.

"I know what they said. They called, 'In the night, in the night!'"

"When did you see His Grace last?"

"Many days ago." Alixe fixed the shifty eyes with her steady look.

"Had you a hand in—in—this?"

Halle looked down and muttered: "I had not."

"Will you swear it?"

"Yes, yes, anything! Only do not open the door to them."

Alixe took from the chiffonier her silver cross.

"Swear," she said, "on Virginia's cross." She held out the symbol. The priest shuddered and drew back, but at the increasing noise below he eagerly clutched it and kissed it fervently. "I swear!" he whispered hoarsely, "I swear!"

There were footsteps on the stairs. They came nearer and more near. Then sounded the expected summons on the panel of the door. "Open! open! in the name of the law!"

Alixe looked toward the priest crouched upon the floor. He was edging toward the bed. He reached out his arm and raised the valance. He was about to conceal himself there. Alixe shook her head and

made motion with her lips, "They will look there first."

Again the summons at the door.

Alixe straightened herself to her full height.

"Who is it that comes at the dead of night to frighten helpless and unprotected women?"

"Open, Madame la Duchesse, and we will tell you. This door, all doors, must be opened." Alixe glanced again at Halle. He was shaking as if in a chill. He rolled his sunken eyes at her beseechingly. He clasped his shaking hands in supplication, then clutched her robe, and wound his fingers in the long braid of hair that fell to the lace ruffle which swept the floor. His face had lost all trace of color.

"They will take me," he whined, in a broken whisper—the tears were raining down his cheeks, his tonsured head was bare. Alixe could not repress a feeling of disgust as she looked at him. "I will open in a moment," she called; "give me but a moment. Get up," she whispered. The man arose, she threw back the cover of the bed. "Hide there!" She nodded her head with a contemptuous motion toward the opening. "Back, back!" she whispered, "or I will not answer for your safety."

When she turned again to the door there was naught to be seen of the priest. He had shrunken down behind the great piece of furniture, and was almost concealed in the crack between it and the wall.

Alixe took Gartha up in her arms, she spoke aloud to her and soothingly: "Do not be frightened, my Sweet. It is I, Alixe," and laid her down in the middle of the bed. Then she again approached the door. Her motions had been so swift that the rapping was only just renewed. Then she spoke.

"Who is it that you seek?"

"A priest. A man named Halle. It is known that he struck the Archbishop down last night as he came from a visit to the Cardinal. We must search here as well as elsewhere."

"You must wait a moment," said Alixe; "when I call, then enter."

She unlocked the door, walked swiftly to the bed and lay down by Gartha, her hand caressing the child.

"Now enter," she called.

The door was opened, and three sergeants de ville pushed into the room. As they entered, Alixe, who could not preserve the deceiving appearance of calm which she had planned, arose to a sitting posture.

"And is this the manner," she asked, "in which the police of France protect the people who live within their borders? Do they force themselves in on women and little children? The child has been ill, burned, near death, and you come expecting to find the Archbishop's murderer here. Do you know that the Archbishop was my friend? Would I, think you, willingly harbor his murderer?"

Alixe had now arisen and stood in the middle of the floor, scornfully surveying, from her tall height, the short officer in front of her.

It was a wonderful picture that upon which he looked. Her splendid hair fell in great braids, and swept the lace at the bottom of her robe. Her white feet were bare. In her hand she still held the amethyst cross, which caught the lights reflected from the lantern in the hand of one of the soldiers.

The chief officer cast a suspicious glance about the great room.

"To whom were you speaking?" he demanded.

"I was soothing the child," she said, motioning with her head toward the little white heap.

"Is there no one else here?"

"You may look, you may search, you have my full permission."

"We know that the man we seek is a frequent guest of the Abbey."

"Yes, yes, he has been. He was a friend of us all. We never credited aught against him. I will not believe that he committed this dreadful deed; but, if he were here, and I believed your charge against him, do you not think that I would give him up to you, old friends though we are?"

"Will you swear that he is not in the room?"

Alixe threw her head proudly back, and looked down upon the man from lids which were almost closed. In her most scornful voice she said:

"I have told you that he is not here. Is not that enough?"

"Madame la Duchesse swears it?"

"He is not here," was the reply. "The man whom you seek is not here."

The officer in charge cast an irresolute glance at the two sergeants de ville. "It is enough, Madame," he said. He bowed and withdrew with the others into the hall. When they were half way down the stair Alixe closed the door and locked it.

She swept across the room and neared the bed.

"Come, Robert," she whispered. "Come, you are saved!" She heard the heavy footsteps below stairs, crossing the salon. She heard the men go to the outer gate, which the quaking Charles opened only too willingly, and ride away toward Moncousis. The priest had heard also the departing gallop of the

horses. He slid from the protecting cover, and remained standing where his sandalled feet touched the floor. His look was fastened upon Alixe, the woman who had just rescued him from shame and death. Alixe raised her eyes to his with relief, but there was something repellant in the gaze that he turned upon her, something new, of freedom, and presumption, and demand. For the first time in her life Alixe felt a horror of him; she was afraid.

She went swiftly to the head of the bed, and drew aside the curtains. "Come here," she said sternly.

The withdrawal of the curtains discovered a recess and sliding panel within the wall.

"Help me," she ordered. The tone was new to Halle. Together they pushed the heavy mass of wood and iron away. Alixe reached her hand within the recess and unlocked the panel. She pushed it aside. It slid within its case in the thick wall. She turned to the priest, and pointing to the opening, she uttered the one word, "Go!"

He stretched out his arms to her. His gaze enveloped her with a bold and despairing admiration, he seemed devouring her beauty, a beauty of whose ravishing extent he had never dreamed until now.

The look of the priest was glaring, intense, fixed. It rapidly became one of insult, an unholy passion blazed within his eyes, he took a step nearer. Alixe shrank back and away from him. She held him with a steady eye, though her heart was bursting with anger and fear. She pointed toward the open doorway with an imperious motion of the hand.

"Go!" she said, in a low and steady voice. "I hear the horses again. It may have been only a ruse." At her words Halle, with a look of terror, slunk to-

ward the opening. "And if they do return, I shall tell no more lies for you, coward!"

As Alixe closed the panel it grazed the shoulder of the priest. She pushed it quickly home and locked it, and also pushed in place the heavy bolt, and then, the strain being over, she threw herself upon her knees in the Abbess's prie-dieu.

"Oh, my dear Archbishop!" she cried. "My dear, dear Archbishop!"

XL.

Quentin watched the corner of the garden for several days, but he did not see Alixe again. He haunted the churches and scanned the journals to see if any one, or rather the one in whom he was interested, had taken the vows which would shut her away from the world and himself forever more, but he heard of no one that he knew taking up the conventual life. Finally, after an interminable two weeks of long days spent on his balcony with no reward, he left his apartment one afternoon, determined to seek the Archbishop and implore him once more to tell him all that he knew. After leaving the door of his house he walked along the little street, and came to the great gate of the convent. Suddenly a new thought struck him. Why not go boldly in and ask to see Alixe herself? No sooner thought of than done. He rang the bell and at once greeted the sister in attendance.

"I wish to see the Duchesse di Brazzia," said Quentin.

"The Duchesse di Brazzia? I know of no such person," said the sister. "Is it, perhaps, the tall lady who has just taken the veil?"

How far down Quentin's heart sank at these words he could not estimate. It seemed a physical fall of that organ, and it thumped and beat in its fall like a steam-hammer.

"She has taken the veil!" he exclaimed, and then leaned against the inside of the gate unable to say more.

The gentle little sister, seeing his distress, suggested: "Perhaps Monsieur would like to see the Mother Superior. She can tell the monsieur more than I can."

Quentin followed the serving sister as if in a dream. She took him into the interior of the convent, and seated him in the reception room. When he was left alone he became a prey to the gravest fears, the bitterest thoughts. Could it be possible that her life had been so hard that she had voluntarily resigned the world and its friendships? He did not say pleasures, for Alixe had had few real pleasures. He felt suddenly a renewed animosity toward his friend, Madame. Even were Alixe unhappily married, was not her mother left to her? Could not she soften this hardest of all hard trials?

He groaned and covered his face with his hands.

"You wish to speak with me?"

Quentin looked up to see a woman in the habit of a nun standing near him. He had not heard her enter, and yet the room had been deathlike in its stillness.

Quentin arose at once and controlled himself.

"Madame," said he, "may I see the Duchesse di Brazzia?"

The Mother Superior looked surprised. She did not answer at once. When she spoke, she said:

"From whom do you come?"

"I have no credentials," said Quentin, forcing a smile, "but I am a friend of the Duchesse di Brazzia, and it is important that I should see her for a few moments."

"Do you come from the Archbishop?"

"No."

"Does he know that you are coming here to-day?"

"No, Madame. I thought of going to him, but I was passing your gate, and felt impelled to come in and ask for myself. You do not answer me. What has happened? Can I not see her?"

"She whom you call the Duchesse di Brazzia is not here, monsieur."

"Whom I call the Duchesse di Brazzia!" Quentin was breathless. "Whom I call the Duchess di Brazzia! What! What do you——"

"We already called her Sœur Cecile among ourselves," said the Mother Superior, smiling; "soon we hope to have her feel that she has cast off the old name and taken the new one forever."

"Then she has taken no vows as yet?"

"No, Monsieur."

"And may I see her?"

"She is not here, Monsieur; I have told you already.

"Oh, yes, yes—pardon, Madame, not here? Where then?"

"That I cannot tell you. It was her request that we should give her address to no one. When a sorely tried soul is thinking of entering the conventual life, Monsieur, it does not wish to be disturbed with the thoughts of the world and worldly things."

"But this is monstrous!" said Quentin. "Monstrous! That such a woman, born to ornament society——"

"Born for the service of the Lord, Monsieur," returned the Mother Superior gravely. There was a silence of some seconds, which finally she broke.

"And may I ask what claim you have on the Duchesse di Brazzia?"

Quentin looked down and bit his lip. "None," he said.

"You are not then, by chance, the Count St. Aubin?"

"I am not," said Quentin.

"Not her brother-in-law, Monsieur Valery?"

"No," answered Quentin.

"Nor relative of any kind?"

"I am not," said he again.

The Mother Superior looked the young man over from head to foot. If ever there was a human being for whom a woman would willingly risk the perils of the world, this was the man. Some such thought may have passed through the Mother Superior's mind, some dim and far-away echo of the love song of her youth, but her face was set and stern, and her voice showed no sympathy, if she felt any.

"And what has a young man, not a relative, to do with a young and beautiful woman like the Duchesse di Brazzia?" Almost the words which the Archbishop had used.

"It is true," he said. "There is no answer. I am less than nothing to her, but I cannot stand by and see her immured within walls such as these, leaving the world, where some time she may find happiness, to take up a career against which she will chafe and rebel, and find too late that it is not what she had hoped."

"With all of which I have nothing to do, Monsieur. I know that from my standpoint the holy life is the only one, and——"

"And you are, all of you, urging her to accept it;

to come and seclude herself among you; to take oaths, which, when taken, cannot be broken; you are influencing her——"

"Naturally," returned the Mother Superior. "Naturally. Not that she is a person, the Duchesse di Brazzia, who is easily influenced," a shade of annoyance crossed the speaker's face. "She judges for herself, and argues it out step by step. She will not go one inch beyond her convictions. When you hear that the Duchesse di Brazzia has taken the veil, you may rest assured that nowhere else could she have found happiness. Even should she remain in the world, she will ever have a leaning toward the holy life. She is high principled and faithful, she is——"

"I know, I know, Madame," said Quentin. "You can tell me nothing good about her of which I am not assured already; but you can tell me one thing that I do not know, and that is where she is at this moment."

"And you would crave to know against her expressed wish?"

"No, not if I believed it to be her expressed wish."

"You may rest assured that it is, Monsieur."

Quentin bowed and went away. He felt almost certain that Alixe was still within the convent, and if not, that she had been taken to some other to elude him. It must be the Archbishop's doing. He would go to him and demand to know where they had concealed this splendid young creature, that they might fill the coffers of their church with her fortune. The injustice of this suspicion Quentin did not appreciate. All men are prejudiced, and most men are unjust, because it is almost impossible to judge fairly from a standpoint of prejudice.

Quentin was overwhelmed by a feeling of supreme

pity for this charming, helpless being, whom he was convinced was badgered, put upon, over-conscientious, unsympathized with, except by the Archbishop, whose kindness and personal and truly spiritual attractions, he felt and feared, might prove a strong factor toward persuading Alixe to shelter herself within the walls of the cloister.

XLI.

When Quentin was ushered out of the convent gate, he walked blindly along, not knowing where to go. Finally, he found himself in the Rue Vaugirard and near the Luxembourg Gardens. He did not go up the steps that lead to the gallery, but turned and walked into the open gate, and went along the gravelled path to where he saw an empty bench beneath the shade of a tree. The bench was near a little pond upon which some ducks were disporting themselves, and Quentin sat idly watching them as they stood on their heads or swam about in the water, and then—his gaze wandered across the pond. Away upon the other side, he suddenly caught sight of the Archbishop. Here would be a solution of the difficulty. The Archbishop was walking very fast in the other direction; that is, exactly away from him. He must skirt the entire pond before he could catch up with him. He started to walk at a smart pace, and had nearly encircled the water when he was stopped by a deep ditch, and a printed notice that this passage was interdicted. Quentin, nothing loath, ran and made a flying leap across the heads of the workmen beneath. There was a great outcry, and he found himself promptly stopped by a gendarme. Experience had taught Quentin that resistance in such a case only made matters worse.

Explanations were in order, some money was slipped into the hand of the soldier with Quentin's card; but

the little disturbance had lasted long enough to prevent the fulfilment of his desires, and when he was again at liberty the Archbishop had disappeared. Quentin ran toward the gate out of which he must have passed, but his straining eyes saw no one that looked like his old friend, and he sulkily hailed a passing cab and ordered the cocher to drive to Madame's number.

It was a long drive, and Quentin was certain that the man had skirted the Exposition buildings to make the trip more lucrative. He had said, "A l'heure," and the little horse jogged along at a snail pace, notwithstanding the repeated loud cracks of the whip.

Quentin remembered what Valery had once said about Paris cabmen: That all their horses were trick horses; that the horses knew by a certain sort of crack of the whip whether it was a false alarm, or whether it was really meant as an incentive to haste. The whip cracked incessantly, the horse kept up his slow jog-trot pace, minding the apparent request to be more speedy no more than a cavalry horse minds the booming of artillery, and Quentin leaned back and resigned himself to the inevitable.

Arrived at Madame's door, he mounted the stairs in no time and rang impatiently. As before, Madame was at home; and as before, he heard a great deal of rustling about in the next room, for what woman, even if she is to be married to another man, wishes either a discarded or discarding lover to see her looking anything but her best? Madame remained longer before the glass than usual, and came in smiling, with a rose bloom on her cheek which Quentin was certain had been placed there, and not by the hand of God, since he had rung the bell. There are a few things

that Omnipotence cannot accomplish. This is one of them.

Madame had not seen Quentin since their encounter in this very room, and her manner was somewhat shy and unassured; but it is never too late to mend such matters, and she placed herself in a chair now, not on the sofa, that there might be no reminder from locality of that painful scene of a day some weeks past.

"You are a stranger," said Madame, smiling, "but always welcome."

She did not put out her hand until Quentin stretched out his own, and then, after a short handclasp, withdrew it at once. Madame had discovered that there are men into whose good graces women must retreat, not advance. She had learned a great deal in theory since last they met.

Quentin seated himself rather awkwardly. A man never feels so uncomfortable as when he has snubbed, or has had to snub, a woman who really cares for him, and he was experiencing now the consequences of a careless and too ardent friendship, which he had never intended should be anything more.

"I have come to ask you that same question over again," said Quentin abruptly. He was determined that this time, at least, he should not be misunderstood. "Where is your daughter?" he blurted out boldly. His tone, and the words "your daughter," brought a deeper flush to Madame's cheek than the chamois skin had left there.

Madame drew herself up coldly.

"As I told you before, I do not know where she is at this moment."

"Is she at a convent? Has she taken the veil? Has she bound herself by vows——"

"Do not get excited, Mr. Quentin, over the Duchesse di Brazzia. Whatever she does will be permitted by her husband, the Count St. Aubin, and I cannot see what you or any other man, or woman, can have to do with it."

"That is very true," said Quentin. "I know that I have nothing to do with it. God knows that I have had very little to do either with it or her; but I am asking a simple question, one for information. Even after it is answered, I shall not know what to do any more than I know now, any more than I have known what to do since the first moment I saw her."

"You are very frank, Mr. Quentin," Madame's eyelids trembled, she pressed her lips together; "you were my friend. You came to visit me."

"Yes, yes!" broke in Quentin. "And I shall thank you ever and always from the very depths of my heart for giving me a chance to——"

"Heroics are quite out of place, Mr. Quentin, from a young—from an unmarried man about a married woman." Quentin felt as if he had received a cold douche. "There is one thing that I can certainly tell you, and that is, that, no matter how you pursue Alixe, no matter how much you try to change her determination, nothing in the world can alter it when once her mind is made up. I do not say that it is made up; she has always judged for herself——"

"Did she judge for herself when you married her to that little mountebank——"

"You are speaking of my nephew, Mr. Quentin," said Madame dryly. "You were a visitor in his house, and no matter how much you may feel your superior height and good looks, it is most ungenerous of you."

"I made no comparisons. I thought of none. It is patent to every one that it was a monstrous marriage. She was so young! Hardly more than eighteen."

"I was married at seventeen," said Madame.

"What did she know of marriage?" pursued Quentin. "And with such a gnome as that! Why, it is Beauty and the Beast over again. If she loved him, could possibly love him——"

"And has she confided to you that she does not love her husband, Mr. Quentin?"

"No! No!" shouted Quentin; "God forbid! We have never had any conversation except on the most commonplace matters. I hardly know her, even through conventional mediums. But I do know that she suffers; I have seen it in her eyes, heard it in the tones of her voice; I learn it now, because she, who should be madly in love with life, with all that she has to live for, talks of taking the veil, of immuring herself within the walls of St.——"

"She cannot do so unless her husband gives his consent."

"And will he?"

"Bruno is a little exigeant about the amount that Alixe shall give him before he will agree," said Madame.

"Bless him for that," said Quentin, "no matter what his motives are."

"Alixe does not wish to go to the sisterhood empty-handed, and that is why——"

"Poor soul! driven out of the world, out of the sunshine! Driven away from the love and happiness that she might possess, to find——"

"To find peace, Mr. Quentin, so his dear Grace

says, to find peace, and I, a good Catholic, cannot contradict him. I may confess to you that I am not over pleased at this desire of Alixe's, because I lose more than any one. I lose a country home where I can run down for a week when I am tired of Paris. I lose a relative whose title is the Duchesse di Brazzia, and Alixe, with all her failings, is rather generous in the way of presents. Here is what she sent me the other day." Madame stretched out a plump arm and showed Quentin a bracelet containing a jewel-mounted watch. "She said she should need nothing now but a simple timepiece to remind her when the hour arrives for her devotions; in fact, the convent bell should do for that. You see what I lose, Mr. Quentin. Much more than you, who hardly know her."

"You lose a daughter," returned Quentin, "who has been all kindness and gentleness, no matter what your attitude toward her has been. I unfortunately overheard——"

"What! What did you hear?" asked Madame, paling under her color.

Quentin did not answer. He arose. "That is all beside the question," he said. "Then, as you will tell me nothing, I will leave you. I had hoped that you would be willing to relieve my tortured mind somewhat. I wish you every happiness, Madame; but I hope never to see you again until you can tell me that that unhappy soul has come to her senses through some kind and urging word from you."

"I told you, Mr. Quentin, if you remember," said Madame, with heightened color, "that I am not anxious to have her take up the conventual life. But you should talk with the Archbishop; he is much more influential with her than I am."

"I will go to the Archbishop," said Quentin.

"And remember," said Madame, "that whatever he tells you, and whatever you hear of her whereabouts, she herself has expressed the desire that no one will interfere with her now; and do as she wishes, I beg of you."

Across Madame's mind's eye had flashed the picture of Quentin's going down to the Abbey, and the meeting, which, under the guise of friendship, would cover a stronger feeling. As is quite natural, she judged others by what she herself would have done, and she could not bear the thought that her recently lost friend should so suddenly fill her place, more than fill it, with another, and that other her daughter, Alixe.

As for Quentin, he would have said that Madame had never filled the niche where Alixe was enshrined; in fact, that she had been but a dear friend, a devoted friend, with an embarrassing amount of attention toward himself, a much younger person, and nothing more. Quentin did not trust himself to speak again. He bowed himself hurriedly out, with the fixed idea that the Archbishop was now the only one to solve the difficulty for him. As he came into the outer hall, and started toward the general stair, never too light in Paris houses, he heard a sound, a sort of hissing sound it was, which fell suddenly upon his ear.

He raised his eyes to see a little figure standing at the extreme end of the corridor. The arm of this little person was outstretched, and was beckoning desperately with claw-like finger.

He approached nearer and found that it was Mademoiselle, who stood under the hanging, unlighted lamp.

"Have you heard the news?" she asked.

"No, what news?" asked Quentin.

"The news of Gartha."

"No." Quentin was mildly interested. News of Alixe was what he wished. "Is the child here? Is she well?"

"Then you have not heard! She has been nearly killed. It was with the explosives at the Abbey." Mademoiselle was voluble in her own tongue.

"Poor little Gartha!" said Quentin in a softened voice. "Who was with her?"

"Her father was there, and I was there. They telegraphed for her aunt——"

"Her aunt——"

"The Duchesse di Brazzia. Hush! Come down to the premier étage. She watches like a cat. She will think I am telling you. I saw you come in. I was in the street on a small errand. I waited until your long talk with Madame was over. Come down here! There!"

Mademoiselle had gone hurriedly down the flight of stairs; and not any too soon, for the door of Madame's apartment opened, and some one came out upon the landing, stood there for one moment, and then went back, and the door was closed.

"She said I was not to tell you if you came, but I see no harm in it. Why should one tell a falsehood if there is nothing to gain by it? If there were any good reason, why then——"

"Is Gartha much hurt?" asked Quentin anxiously.

"She was badly burned." Mademoiselle's moustache quivered with emotion for the child, whom she really loved, and who in return liked her so little. "But the English doctor is bringing her through."

"And the Duchesse is there?" There was a note of joy in Quentin's voice that Mademoiselle could not fail to remark.

"You will not tell that I told?"

"No, certainly not," said Quentin. "Do you suppose that I wish to get you into trouble with——" He motioned with his head upward.

"And you will not go there?"

"No, not unless I am asked to go."

"You will not be asked to go," said Mademoiselle. "Yesterday she talked of you—Gartha, I mean, and her father said that he should bring you back with him from Paris; but her aunt, the Duchess, said decidedly, no, there was no need of it, and that she could receive no one now."

Quentin's look of mortification did not pass unnoticed by Mademoiselle. "It is right," she said. "No lady of the Duchess's position can receive a gentleman at her house, and a young man like yourself—Monsieur Valery has strange ideas—but——"

"We may trust to the Duchess to keep him straight," said Quentin, with a bitter little laugh.

"Certainement," answered Mademoiselle in a perplexed tone. "Gartha is getting on well. Mr. Valery is to come up to town in a day or two."

"I shall do nothing more, now," said Quentin. "I have made myself obnoxious enough, I fear; but I shall go to see the Archbishop. Where will Mr. Valery be when he comes to-morrow?"

Mademoiselle gave him the name of Valery's hotel, and then, as she heard a footstep above, she turned away and waddled puffily up the stairs. As Quentin left the house he walked close along the wall. He did not cross the street, for he felt certain that Madame

was lying in wait to see him come out, and the poor little Weasel, to prevent Madame from discovering that they had met and talked together, would be obliged to stretch her mendacity to the utmost limit. There are wonderful possibilities in an apartment house, as Quentin had just found to his satisfaction, and Mademoiselle was discovering how much more could be accomplished here sub rosa than at the Abbey. When Mademoiselle entered the apartment, she found Madame standing at the window drumming with her fingers on the pane. The day was chilly, and the long windows were closed. Her face was pressed close to the glass, and she was straining her eyes first to the right and then to the left. Evidently her espionage had met with no reward.

"Oh! it is you. Did you meet Mr. Quentin?" said Madame.

"Monsieur Quentin!" Mademoiselle's tone expressed all that there was of astonished surprise. "Has he been here?"

"Don't tell me that you have not seen him, Mademoiselle, for he left me not more than fifteen minutes ago!"

"I shall not tell you that I have not seen Monsieur Quentin, Madame——"

"There," said Madame triumphantly. "What did I suspect!"

"And why suspect, Madame? I did see Monsieur Quentin, it is true; but that is not saying that I have spoken with him. Monsieur came out of the door as I was hurrying back from the Rue de la Tremoille. He went in the direction of the Champs Elysées; he seemed to be in too much haste to stop and speak to me; but then, Madame—" with a shrug of the shoul-

ders—"I am only a poor gouvernante, a companion, and old. The Messieurs are for the young and the beautiful, not for the elder ladies like to you and to me."

"It is not necessary for you to make comparisons, Mademoiselle," said Madame sharply. "My age is not to be mentioned with yours."

"Monsieur has so handsome a back; so young a back," said Mademoiselle. "I saw it, his back. I thought that perhaps he had heard of Gartha's accident, and had come to ask about her."

"Indeed, then, he has not heard anything at all of Mademoiselle Gartha's accident, Mademoiselle, and I forbid you, if you should meet him, and speak with him, to mention it."

Mademoiselle smiled internally. Almost all of her smiles were internal, and while she lived with Madame they were also eternal.

"What are you smiling at?"

"I, Madame?—I smiling?"

"You will remember what I have just said."

"I shall remember, Madame."

"I believe that she has seen and talked with him. I wonder how much she has told him," mused Madame. "Oh, dear! If every one wouldn't always try to put their finger into every one else's pie."

XLII.

Quentin thought a good deal of Gartha, his little friend at the Abbey, as he walked back to his hotel. More, perhaps, because of her companion. Had she been alone his thoughts must necessarily have been divided. His joy was great to know that Alixe was not yet the perpetual inmate of a convent, placed there by her own will. Much as he regretted Gartha's accident, he could but welcome any occurrence which would keep Alixe in the world for a little longer time. He did not go to see the Archbishop after all. He had felt snubbed and humiliated by the Mother Superior, and he saw now that he had perhaps worn his heart upon his sleeve for these good people to peck at. He had learned all that there was to know from Mademoiselle, and Alixe was, at least for the time, in the home that she loved. He would cease to worry about her, and let things take their course for the present.

He felt tired. He had been living on his nerves. He was neither eating nor sleeping well, and suddenly he decided to go for a day or so to the forest of Fontainebleau and see what that would do for him.

He went to his hotel, sent his wheel to the Gare de Lyons, and two hours more saw him on his way to that paradise of the art student, male or female. He scoured the paths and roads of the forest; he caught picturesque glimpses of men and maids from Barbizon

and other villages, sitting underneath the trees, palette in hand, or hand in hand, as the case might be. The sight of such incessant and open love-making palled upon him, and after two days of hard riding he returned to town with a fair appetite and two nights of sleep to the good.

Quentin arrived in Paris in the morning, and, driving as far as the Pont de la Concorde, he paid his fare, dismissed his cocher, and started on a brisk walk across the open space toward the Automobile Club. As his heels rang smartly out on the asphalted pavement he was all at once confronted with a figure which he well knew. This figure was approaching him from the direction in which he was going, and a moment after Quentin discovered him, they met face to face.

"Holà!" said Valery, for it was he.

"Holloa, Valery," said Quentin, "I am truly glad to see you."

This autumnal butterfly was resplendent with the newest creations of the tailor's art, the latest ideas in color that his brain could evolve. So gorgeous was he that heads were thrust out of carriage windows, and riders on automobiles and wheels turned to look once and again.

"Take that!" said Valery, as he doubled his fist and gave Quentin a welcoming punch in the region of the diaphragm. "Where are you bound?"

"What good luck I am in," said Quentin heartily. "Mine must be changing. How is Gartha? Better? And the Duch——?"

"Now, which of all these questions do you want answered?" said Valery, with his broad, good-natured grin.

Quentin knew, but he could wait. "Tell me how the little girl is."

"Right as a trivet," said Valery, "or I should not have come. Why, it was only yesterday that she called Alixe and me to her bedside, and said that she was near death, and thought that she ought to be married to you before mortification set in."

Quentin laughed heartily, the first good laugh that he had enjoyed for weeks. They walked across the square, and Valery gave him the details of what Gartha had considered her last wishes.

Suddenly he broke off.

"I wonder what's the matter with you, Quentin. See how people are staring. Turn around. Have you anything queer about your back or anything? I never saw so much interest in a man in Paris in my life."

Quentin gave a comprehensive glance at his friend, and walked onward without explanation. What he saw was a pale gray alpine hat surrounded with a band of white, suffering from an eruption of red spots as large as a franc. The turned-over collar was striped green and pink, and round its wearer's neck was a tie of yellow, whose flowing ends were knotted in front and spread gayly to the breeze. The coat was of a pale cinnamon shade; the waistcoat of a pale blue, ornamented with large gold buttons, an open crimson rose glowing from the button-hole. Shoes of russet leather which struggled vainly for notice against the enveloping light gray gaiters, and long, full, white trousers, completed the costume of the Rastaquouère. "Quite enough," Quentin thought, "to cause the general and comprehensive stare of the Paris crowds."

"Come over to Maxim's," said Valery, as they walked along. "We can be quiet there."

"Quiet at Maxim's, on the street, among the staring crowds!" Quentin smiled broadly.

"So Eldon's really going to take up the white man's burden!" said Valery. "Gad! I'm glad it's him instead of me. He'll find my respected mother-in-law a trifle heavy at times. Worse than a Boer or a Kaffir when it comes to shielding her from the cauld blast on yonder lea, on yonder lea. His plaidie has got to be made of Brussels lace, clasped with diamonds, if he wants to keep Mamasha really warm and comfortable. Poor old Eldon!" Valery shook his head pityingly. "He deserves a better fate. Little cat!"

Quentin sighed as he remembered pleasures which he had resigned with so much ease. It had been a pleasant friendship, and after all it is agreeable to have a pretty woman and a young-looking woman——

"There's a gospel chap in the Quarter that I wish they'd employ. He's a parson for revenue only. Eldon's sure to give a good fee."

"You seem to be philanthropically inclined," said Quentin, waking up. "What is your interest in him, the gospel chap, as you call him?"

"None," said Valery, puffing away at his Havana; "the interest is in myself, my best friend. He has owed me shekels, lo! these many moons. If Eldon would agree to hire him, I might get out an injunction on Eldon to have the money paid over to me; it's the only way I'll ever get a ha'penny of it. But—" stopping on the pavement and facing Quentin—"where have you been all this time, old man? In hiding from Mamasha?"

"I am just back from the country. And you?"

"I only came up from the Abbey this morning. I dismissed my cocher at the club and went out to find you. I have a message for you—" Quentin's heart beat faster—"from Gartha—" and ran slow again. "What a noise these rascals are making. What do they say?"

This question was evoked by the shouts of the newsboys. They were calling shrilly: "In the night!" "In the night!"

Quentin beckoned to one, who ran up and waited while he felt in his pocket for some silver. Valery seized the paper.

"Que faites-vous? Vous!" said Valery, in tones of thunder to the sharp-eyed little gamin. "What's all this noise about?" He looked at the headings as Quentin paid the lad. "What? What's this? Quentin! Quentin! Do you see! Oh, good God! Quentin, look here! The Archbishop! The Archbishop!"

"What?" said Quentin. "What is it?" And then he recalled the incessant clamor of the newsboys, which had pursued him all the way from the station. The news of the day had been of little interest to him; he had paid no attention to it.

"Come into the club," said Valery. "I cannot read it here."

Together the two entered the club, and going up the stairs and out upon the balcony, they scanned the headlines for the details of the dreadful intelligence, fearing the worst, hoping for the best.

As Valery read aloud, there came to Quentin's mind in a flash the sombre picture of the priest, Halle, lurking behind the angle of the convent wall, waiting

for the Archbishop to appear. Valery threw down *Le Matin*. "Come over to my rooms," he said, "and let us talk it over. We can't do anything, I suppose?"

They came out into a dark autumn day, chilly for the season, and went to Valery's rooms in a near-by hotel.

"Send up some wood," said Valery, as he passed the office, "and plenty of it."

Quentin followed him to the lift, and they soon were in Valery's rooms. They had not been long seated when some servants appeared, bringing baskets of wood, rolls of kindlings, etc.

"Come in!" said Valery, "come in! How many more are there of you? Please give my compliments to the gérant, and tell him that I have no intention of building a house. There! that will do, I haven't any woodshed up here. Take back two or three cart-loads, and tell the gérant that he can send up the rest of the building material to-morrow."

"That's the first time that I ever saw what, in America, we call plenty of wood, in a Paris hotel," said Quentin.

Shocked at the dreadful news that he had heard, he could but laugh at Valery's dry humor, which, it is needless to say, was quite wasted on the French servants.

"I've trained 'em," laughed Valery.

"If you don't mind, I will build the fire," said Quentin. "I don't believe any one in the world knows more about fires than an American savage. We are brought up to it." Soon the logs were blazing hotly, and the two men, who were fast growing friends, sat and smoked, and talked and wondered. Finally

Quentin took the cigar from between his lips and looked at Valery, searchingly.

"Have you any suspicion who could have committed such an awful deed?"

Valery shook his head as he gazed into the fire. "No," said he, "not the slightest. How should I have?"

"I wonder," said Quentin, after a short silence, "whether I ought to tell you what I know?"

"Certainly you should, if you know anything. But how could you? What had you to do with the Archbishop more than to meet him for a few hours at the Abbey?"

"Your question is a sensible one, but I have seen something, and taken in conjunction with what I know, it seems as if I may be on the right track."

"Let's have it," said Valery, turning lazily in his chair and looking at Quentin through partly closed eyes.

Quentin began his narration. As he proceeded, and finally mentioned the Alsatian's name, Valery shook his head.

"Oh, no, no!" he said. "You're way off, quite on the wrong track, quite! Halle hadn't enough cause for such a deed, and if he had the cause, he had not the courage. I never thought Bob a saint, even when he took holy orders, for I knew too much about him; but I can't imagine him, loose-principled as he was, enough of a blackguard to commit a crime. You will have to think up some other solution, Quentin. I'm afraid you let your personal prejudices affect your judgment. You don't like Halle."

"No," answered Quentin, "I confess to not liking the man overmuch. He was rude, and, later, insult-

ing to me at the Abbey, where I was a guest at the same time with himself; but, of course, that does not make him a criminal."

"I don't know," said Valery. "I think rudeness a crime, don't you?"

"I wonder where Halle is to-day?" said Quentin.

"Off with Bruno somewhere, looking up some mechanic who will make the parts of their precious automobile. The truth is, they think they have such a wonderful invention, that they are afraid to trust one person with more than one part, and so they get men all over the country to make it. Why, those men never know that Bruno is the Count St. Aubin. He talks to them as if he were a paid underling, procuring from them the skilled labor that he wishes for the Count. I have heard them ask to see the Count, and have heard St. Aubin say, 'He is not at home at present,' or 'He cannot be disturbed.' They have never, one of them, so much as laid eyes on him to their knowledge. He employs Halle to do the business part of it."

"That I know very well," remarked Quentin, and then he told Valery about his encounter with the priest in the glade, and Halle's language, which Gartha's presence did not seem to check.

"Oh, I know Halle," said Valery; "you can't tell me anything about Halle. He went into the church for a living. I have never had any respect for him. Now, Alixe thinks him a badly abused man, and much as she likes the Archbishop, she thinks, and always has thought, him prejudiced against Halle. I wonder if we must speak of the poor old fellow in the past tense. Is he dead, I wonder? Did you see?"

"At first he was thought dead; but I find here a

later bulletin which says he is still living. It was late last night, when he was coming from a visit to the Cardinal."

"Poor old man, it will break Alixe's heart, and Gartha's, poor little minx! She said she would have married His Grace were it not against the rules of the church, and you may come in only second best. There is a certain John MacDonald at Ballyrogan——"

"My young nephew, I suppose," said Quentin. "I took him over there when I came out, to see his father's relatives. So Gartha has met Jan, has she?"

Valery laughed. "How funny that is! We never mentioned you, and the boy did not. To think that he should be your nephew!"

"The son of my only sister," said Quentin. "She married a Scotchman named MacDonald, and he died shortly after she did, leaving the lad to me."

"We must have him over here."

"Perhaps, later," acquiesced Quentin.

"I've just thought of something, Quentin," said Valery. "Mamasha wanted me to get Alixe's jewels from the banker. She wants to wear them at the wedding. I forgot all about it and wrote to Alixe only the other day. She gave me an order this morning. Will you go with me?"

"Yes," said Quentin, "I have nothing to do."

The two men went down the stairs and over to the banker's. Quentin followed Valery to the person in charge of the jewels, and witnessed his look of astonishment when Valery produced the order signed by the Duchesse di Brazzia.

"But the jewels are not here," said the clerk.

"The Duchess sent for them only about three days ago."

"Oh, no!" insisted Valery, "for here is the order."

"But I had another order very similar to that," replied the clerk. "It did not look as fresh as this, but it was an order all the same, and signed by the Duchess."

"Who presented it?" demanded Valery, who was now thoroughly frightened.

"Madame Petrofsky."

"Did she say she wished the jewels?"

"No, she only said that her niece, the Duchess, wanted them, and as she brought me the signed order——"

"Was the body of the order in her hand—the Duchess's, I mean?"

"No, that was written by Madame Petrofsky. I know her handwriting very well." The clerk smiled faintly as he remembered various requests for loans which were always in the end repaid by the Duchesse di Brazzia.

"That is very strange," said Valery. "And you say that Madame Petrofsky presented the order herself?"

"Yes, Mr. Valery, I am quite sure of it. I waited on Madame Petrofsky. The jewels are too valuable to trust to an ordinary clerk."

"I must see about this," said Valery as he walked out with Quentin. "That fellow may have made a mistake. Mamasha may not have been here at all, and if so, Madame la Duchesse Alixe is out of a tidy little sum. You'll excuse my going off, Quentin. I'll just run up and see Mamasha, and make sure about this business."

XLIII.

It was not until after the two had parted that Quentin realized that he had learned nothing more of Alixe than he had known before he met Valery.

When Valery arrived at Madame's apartment, he was told by Jeanne, her maid of all work, that she was not at home, but Mademoiselle entertained him for the few moments that he was obliged to wait. Valery was just about to take his departure, when he heard a hurried ring at the bell, and a second one before Jeanne could go to the door, and Madame came rushing in from the little entrance hall in the greatest haste. She breathed as if she had run all the way up the two flights from the street.

"Mademoiselle! Mademoiselle! Where is the key of my desk? Have you seen it?" Her face was flushed, her tone was agitated. She did not perceive Valery, in the dark little salon, but ran to the desk in the corner.

"Oh! here it is in the lock. How careless of me! Thank heaven!" She snapped the lid to, turned the key in the lock, and dropped it in her pocket, then sank into a low chair, quite out of breath.

"Has any one been in the room, Mademoiselle?"

"Yes, I've been here, Mamasha," said Valery, from his dark corner, "and here I am still. Gracious! How you jump, Mamasha. This talk of getting mar-

ried must have got on to your nerves; but why it should, having become a fixed habit as it were——"

"Valery! How you frighten me! I had no idea that you were here! When did you get here? What business have you to come into people's rooms and sit in a dark corner? It's almost like spying upon them, Valery. How can you make me so nervous?"

"I didn't want to make you nervous, dear old Mamasha. I just dropped in to speak to you about a little matter of which you wrote me some time ago."

"But you have already sent——Mademoiselle, will you kindly withdraw?" Mademoiselle glided from the room leaving the door open the width of a crack. "Fermez, fermez!" called Madame.

Mademoiselle gave the door a decided little bang, so promptly that it told at once of her still being in the vicinity, and then the door flew open again.

Madame crossed the room and closed it gently, but firmly. It was the way in which Madame did a great many things. That is, when she was not nervous.

"You sent me the second draft, Valery. Oh, you dear! I haven't cashed it yet. You don't mean to say that you intend sending me another one?"

"Well—ha—hem— Such had not been my intention, Mamasha, but, since you remind me of it——"

"Oh, you dear!" repeated Madame, sinking contentedly back into her seat. Valery's gaze was fixed upon the desk which Madame had just locked in nervous haste. "What's in that escritoire?" he asked bluntly.

"Oh, nothing of any importance. Only private matters of my own."

"Love letters from Eldon, I suppose." Madame,

who had looked down in embarrassment, looked up and smiled at this very pleasant solution of the difficulty.

"I dropped in to see you about another little matter, Mamasha. You remember you wrote me some time ago that you wanted to borrow Alixe's jewels for the wedding, and I thought——"

"Valery," said Madame hurriedly, "I have decided not to ask for them now. I do not need them. Lord Eldon has given me some very handsome things, and I find those will be enough."

"And you don't want me to get them for you, Mamasha?" said Valery, very distinctly.

"No, no! I beg of you, Valery, dear, do not go. I have been thinking that it was rather presuming to ask them of Alixe, and I hope that you will say nothing more about the matter."

"But I have an order from Alixe that I brought up with me to-day from the Abbey."

Madame gave a sudden short gasp. Valery knew what sort of feeling she was experiencing, but she did not know that he understood the meaning of the gasp. It was as if she had said, "Then I need not have done it after all!"

"Well, Valery, dear, please do nothing about it. If Alixe is going into the sisterhood, it would be well to get them out beforehand; but at present we had better wait and see what happens."

"And you have asked nothing about Gartha, Mamasha!"

"You have not given me time, Valery," exclaimed Madame, "with all your queer statements, and bothers, and suggestions. How is the dear child?"

"She has been very ill. Yesterday——"

"Do you think it will prevent the wedding?" asked Madame anxiously.

"Well, I hardly know," answered Valery; "yesterday she wanted me to call the servants round her to bid them farewell."

"Poor child! Poor child!" said Madame, who had fits of caring for Gartha. "And if she is ill, why are you here?"

Valery told Madame of the scene in Gartha's room, holding for the moment his other business in abeyance. At this amusing tale Madame recovered her spirits, and laughed again, the nervous look passing from her face.

"And you have heard of the Archbishop?"

"Yes," said Madame, "that is what took me out this morning. I was going over there to inquire when suddenly I missed my key."

"As you will miss it again," said Valery, picking up the key from the floor.

"Oh, thank you, Valery! How hard it is to keep one's keys." She held out her hand. "Thank you, Valery." She still held out her hand. "Come, give me my key."

"Why are you so anxious for this key, Mamasha?"

"Why—why—it—it—is my key, is it not? Why should I not have it?"

"Because you aren't the proper person to have it. I intend to keep this key, and I intend to use it, and I intend——"

"To—to—do what, Valery? Oh, Valery! what do you mean to do?"

Madame was deathly white, all but the small red spots on either cheek, which no amount of fear could wash away. "Are you going to open my desk?"

"With your usual, unerring accuracy, Mamasha, dear, you have called the turn."

"Why should you open my desk?"

"Simply because I want to see what you guard so carefully inside."

"You are impertinent, Valery—as I told you, only a few private——"

"Oh, don't be afraid. I have no wish to read Eldon's vaporings to my mother-in-law. I merely wish——"

"To do what?"

"To open the desk."

"You said that before, and for what, Valery? Why do you wish to open it?"

"It is a whim of mine."

"You shall not open my desk."

"I am very sorry, dear old Mamasha, but I am afraid I shall have to. I am stronger than you."

"You great, African brute!" said Madame. "Would you open my desk by force?"

"Don't call names, dear Mamasha. Yes, I would open your desk by force, and here goes." Valery arose and took a step toward the desk.

"Valery! Valery! Do not do such a thing. Let me open my own desk; give me the key."

"Very well, Mamasha. Some one has to do it; why not you?"

Madame took the key from Valery, and approached the desk, slowly, looking at her son-in-law over her shoulder, with a sidelong glance.

"Do you really mean it. Must I unlock my desk for you?"

"Yes, Mamasha, dear, as I told you, I am stronger than you—and a great deal more honest——"

"But not as quick-witted," exclaimed Madame, as she suddenly sprang to the side of the room, stooped, and pushed the key down into the opening of the American register near which she stood. There was dead silence, broken only by the key as it went jangling on its journey to the regions below.

Valery bit his lip.

"Now, what are you going to do?" Madame's tone was more than triumphant.

"You little cat!" said Valery. "Even if you are my mother-in-law, I cannot be as respectful as your age demands. You little cat!"

She sank back on the sofa. His breath came fast, he glared at Madame.

"I—I—am a very young mother-in-law, Valery," said Madame, half crying.

"Yes, but a little cat all the same. You are only putting off the evil day, Mamasha, dear, for that desk must be opened."

"And why? It is my personal property." Madame seemed to gain courage from her own attempt to appear courageous. "Valery, if you do not get up from that seat at once, and go out of that door, I will send for the police to put you out."

"Oh, Mamasha, Mamasha! That would indeed be a scandal! That would be a scene!—to put your own son-in-law out of the house; but nothing to the scandal that would happen later."

"What do you mean?" asked Madame, trembling, and breathing very fast.

"You had better have the lock picked, Mamasha, and let me look into the desk. That will save your reputation."

"No, Valery, I will not have the lock picked, nor

will I let you examine my escritoire." She went to the bell and rang it. "We shall see whose wits are the better, yours or mine." To the maid who appeared: "Jeanne, telephone for a sergent de ville."

"But, Madame——"

"Do as I tell you, telephone for a sergent de ville."

"You had better not, Jeanne, my good girl, if you know what is good for you," said Valery.

"Jeanne, will you do as I tell you and telephone for a sergent de ville?"

There was the sound of the outer door of the apartment shutting loudly. "Who is that?" called Madame. "Go at once, Jeanne."

"Oh, Madame," Jeanne was bathed in tears, "Monsieur Valery has been so good to me——"

"There, Mamasha," said Valery triumphantly. "You see what louis and laughter are, as against francs and frowns."

"I would scorn to buy affection," said Madame.

"I know you would, Mamasha," said Valery, "it might deplete your bank account." He turned to the maid. "Jeanne, go for a locksmith."

"Oui, Monsieur," said Jeanne.

"You will do nothing of the kind, Jeanne."

"I go for my bonnet, Monsieur Valery," said Jeanne, to whom Madame had already given warning. Valery ran to the door, and called after Jeanne down the corridor. "I have changed my mind, Jeanne. Go for a policeman, and bring two if you can find them." Jeanne flew along the hall, Madame close behind her. Since Monsieur Valery wished the sergents de ville, Jeanne, expecting to have her little bonnet snatched from her hand, turned defiantly toward Madame as she took it down from the peg; but

Madame was not worrying her mind about bonnets. She dexterously slipped the key from the lock, inserted it on the outside of the door, and before Jeanne, who had gone into an inner room to set her bonnet straight at the glass, returned, Madame had locked her within the room.

"There," called Madame, "if you want the sergent de ville, then I do not. We have never agreed very well, have we, Valery?"

"It is a lady's privilege to change her mind," called back Valery.

"What is that rattling sound, Mamasha dear?" asked he, as he came through the dining-room into the corridor and halted just outside the kitchen door.

"Another key, Valery dear," Madame smiled sweetly.

"You'll have the register full of keys, won't you, dear old Mamasha?" There was war in Valery's eye as he advanced toward the little woman.

"Mademoiselle," shrieked Madame. There was no answer. Mademoiselle had suddenly left the apartment.

"Now, Mamasha," said Valery persistently, "I intend to see into that desk, sooner or later. I can go out and lock you in, by physical force, a means which I hesitate to use upon a lady, more than all upon my own dear mother-in-law, and I can go down-stairs and get the concierge to send some one up here to take the desk away. The alternative is that I can smash it with my foot."

Madame glanced at the russet shoes.

"They're big enough for anything," said she. Her son-in-law made a motion to approach the desk.

"Don't do that, Valery," Madame was again tearful and submissive.

"Very well, then, I shall go out and send for a locksmith to release my friend, Jeanne——"

Madame sniffed and bridled. "Your friend, Jeanne!"

"And while he is here he can open the desk," Valery continued, as if his remarks had not been interrupted. "Now, which will you prefer, dearest Mamasha?"

"Valery, you are a great, big, overgrown, African savage. What Allaire ever wanted to marry you for——"

"Poor little Allaire," said Valery, with a sigh which always accompanied the mention of his dead wife, "I don't think she did, Mamasha. It was you who thrust her at me, poor little dear! and I thank you every day of my life for two years of real happiness. I made her happy, too."

Here was Madame's opportunity.

"And how badly dear Allaire would feel to know that her poor little mother was being bullied by a great big brute of a——"

Valery rose shamefacedly.

"That is true, Mamasha. That is true. If you will tell me honestly what is in that desk, I will go away and leave you."

"You will go away and leave me——"

"Yes, if you tell me truly."

"And you won't tell Alixe?"

"I will tell no one, Mamasha."

"Well, then, they are Alixe's jewels."

"I knew it," said Valery, in tones full of conviction.

"How did you know it?"

"I have been to the banker's, for one thing; for another, because you said that you had decided not to ask for them."

"And what did he tell you—the banker, I mean?" asked Madame nervously.

"He told me that you had brought an order from Alixe. Oh, Mamasha! Mamasha! A forger, and at your early age."

"It is false, Valery. I had an order signed in Alixe's handwriting."

"When did she sign it? Ah, Mamasha, Mamasha, that statement is what the Americans call 'too thin.' C'est cousu de fil blanc."

Madame hesitated.

"When?" asked Valery.

"Well—well—Valery, she—she—signed it—some, some years ago."

"Some years ago! Why, she wasn't married some years ago."

"It depends on what you call some years; say two years ago."

"There are all ways of looking at things; observez l'intégrité en tout, Mamasha."

"I am willing to confess to you, Valery," said Madame in a serious tone, "that it was not lately—in fact, that the order for the jewels was written after the signature was placed upon the paper; but that it is Alixe's signature, you yourself would be obliged to swear in a court of justice."

"Let me see it," said Valery.

"They have it at the bank," said Madame.

"How did you happen to have Alixe's signature?"

"Why, there was an old writing pad on which I

made Alixe practise her name just before she married the dear Duke. I made her write 'Alixe, Duchesse di Brazzia,' 'Alixe, Duchesse di Brazzia,' several times——"

"Not knowing how soon you would wish to use it. Oh, Mamasha, Mamasha! Fie, oh, fie!"

"There was no harm in it," said Madame, speaking very fast. "You needn't be so collet monté, Valery! Valery! a poor woman who lives as I do, one little bonne à tout faire, no luxuries, no bank account, who lives, you may say, on charity, and has a chance to marry a man of title——"

At this moment there was a ring at the outer bell.

"I will go," said Madame.

"And I will stay with the jewels," said Valery.

Madame passed out of the door to return almost immediately, followed by Jeanne, who was in turn followed by two rather sturdy-looking sergents de ville.

"It is the lady," began Jeanne in her weak, frightened voice.

"How under heaven, Jeanne——"

"Through the window by the escalier de service, Monsieur. It is the lady, Messieurs, whom——"

Madame thrust Jeanne aside and faced the foremost of the men. "I order you to arrest this man," she said, pointing to Valery. "He is in my apartments making a disturbance."

"Monsieur l'officier," began Valery, but Madame was too quick for him, with her sweet voice, and sweeter ways, and sweetest eyes.

"Officer," she repeated, "arrest that man." Madame's tone was tragic. The officer gazed at her a moment.

"Is it that I must arrest the Monsieur?"

"Yes, yes! You see that I am alone. This man forces himself upon me—he——"

"I hope that the Monsieur will pardon me," said the officer. "I hope that the Monsieur will make no disturbance. I should not like to use force upon the Monsieur."

"Faith, an' I could do for the two of you," said Valery.

"This is an insane man," said Madame. "How he got in here I do not know." The sergent de ville's eyes wandered and wondered over Valery's butterfly costume and angry face.

"Where do you come from?" he demanded shortly.

Valery laughed, the laugh was a sardonic one; in that laugh the sergent de ville heard the proof of insanity which Madame had declared was there. He glanced behind him to see that his double was within safe distance. There was evidence of hard muscle underneath the light sleeve of H. Valery, Esq.

"Mamasha," said Valery, with an unpleasant glitter of the eye, "I would smash that desk into splinters, but for the distress that it would cause Alixe. I don't want her to be disgraced more than necessary by her own mother."

"Not to mention yourself," added Madame quickly. Then, in French, to the sergent de ville: "You do not understand this man, Monsieur. He threatens to break open my escritoire. It contains family jewels and important papers. You must arrest him at once. Instead of being crazy, I think now that he is drunk. Il est gris, gris, Monsieur, gris comme un cordelier!"

"I hope that Monsieur will make no disturbance, that Monsieur will not compel me to use force, but

since Madame makes this charge—it is Madame's apartment, I suppose——"

"Oh, yes—yes—it's her apartment fast enough."

Valery arose and saluted Madame in the most rastaquouèrian manner, his hat sweeping the floor.

"Mamasha," said he, "I bow to your superior wit, and cleverness, and beauty. I believe you'd flirt with the coal carrier. Good-by! You win this time, dear old Mamasha, but next time look out!"

As Valery walked down the stairs, Madame called shrilly, "Jeanne, Jeanne, get me a fiacre. I must go at once to the bank, and you must come with me." Jeanne, now that her champion Valery had gone, escorted by two officers, the sight of whom causes the bourgeois element to shake as if in the clutches of a chill, Jeanne, the vacillating, wilted and sought a fiacre.

"And Mademoiselle, when she returns, Madame?"

"She should not have gone out," Madame answered her bonne à tout faire; "she can wait now, as other people will have to do." Madame locked the outer door and slipped the key within her pocket. "Tell him to stop at a locksmith's coming home, Jeanne. I shall need him an hour later. To the bank!" said Madame to the cocher, "and if you drive well, double pourboire."

When Madame entered the bank, she at once endorsed a large draft, of whom the payee was Annie Petrofsky, the payer H. Valery.

"Will you deposit any part of this, Madame Petrofsky?" asked the paying teller.

"No, I'll take it all, thank you; all." Madame sighed happily as she received the money.

"Just think what he might have done!" she com-

mused with herself, as she counted out the rouleaux of gold. "If he were not in the police office at this moment, explaining matters, he might be countermanding the order for this delightfully large sum of louis."

As Madame returned to her apartment she halted the cocher twice: once to send a locksmith to her rooms, and the other to write a telegram. Her bridegroom, like all impatient, middle-aged lovers, would have been glad to have fixed an earlier date for the day of the wedding. Madame had put him coyly off, but to-day she seemed to think better of it. Her telegram was addressed to Lord Eldon, Eldon Towers, England, and read:

"I feel now as you do. Can arrange for the day after to-morrow if you can get here. Let me know. Cannot have a grand affair on account of accident to Gartha. Answer."

Lord Eldon was all smiles as he started for the little station near his place—smiles not driven away by Madame's leaving him to pay the charges for the message. He sped swiftly on Love's wings to the continent.

On the day after Valery had been asked to leave Madame's apartments, and had acquiesced, had been escorted to the police office, had sent for an influential French friend, and had explained, and been apologized to, he was sitting in his rooms wondering, as he expressed it, how he could get even with Mamasha. As thus he sat, a telegram was brought in. It was early morning, and the Rastaquouère was sipping his black coffee in a suit of pajamas which made him more resemble a tropical butterfly than anything he had ever worn. The ground of his breakfast suit was yellow;

the bars were very broad and of deep blue, with spaces between. There was an occasional cross stripe of red, which completed a pattern that could only be well shown by two arbiters of fashion.

Valery made a wry face and set down his cup. He rang, and the spruce breakfast waiter appeared at once. H. Valery, Esquire, gave too generous tips for any garçon to keep him waiting one moment longer than necessary.

"Alphonse," he said, in the best French that he could muster, "please give my compliments to the maître d'hôtel, and tell him that I should like more coffee and less burnt bread crusts——"

"But I assure the Monsieur," said Alphonse, in the most perfect English, "that the coffee is made of pure coffee, and is made fresh every day, and is bought at Potin's, and is made by the chef, in the finest copper utensils of the batterie de cuisine, and is——"

"Tu parles! Charles, tu parles!" said Valery in the slang of the day, shaking his flat hand at the man with a patting motion in the air. "Tu parles, Charles! Go tell the maître d'hôtel."

There was a knock at the door. Alfonse opened it, to receive a telegraphic message for H. Valery, Esquire, which he handed to that gentleman. Valery jumped from his seat. He forgot his coffee, he forgot his wish to snub Alphonse for his much speaking, he seized the paper and tore it open at once. He hardly allowed his eyes to skim along the lines before he dashed the telegram to the floor, and began seizing various articles of dress, and crowding them into a valise. His face was white, his hands shaking so that he could not hold a piece of clothing when he had taken it from the chair.

"Send that lazy Savin up here at once," he said. "Here, Savin, where have you been? Pack these things at once; order me a cab, somebody. I must get away at once. No, leave the other things. Here, lock up the rooms and let us be off."

Valery had started out of the door with a high hat upon his head, his feet thrust into a pair of red cloth slippers, and no other clothing than the yellow and blue night-suit. As many times as he had cut a curious figure because of his florid taste in dress, this moment eclipsed them all. When Alphonse reminded him that he could hardly take the train in such a costume, he growled, then raged, and wept alternately, and finally sent Savin on to the station for the tickets.

The telegram was from Alixe, and read, "Come at once." Naturally, Valery's heart gave a bound. Gartha was his first thought.

"How could I go and leave the child?" he exclaimed aloud. "How could I?"

XLIV.

When the priest had found himself upon the wrong side of the door, he shivered again with fright. His teeth chattered, he reeled and put his hand to his head. Then he listened. He could hear nothing but the vain efforts of Alixe to push the great bed back into its proper position. He dared not move, for he knew that there were stairs somewhere in the vicinity, and he feared to plunge down them headlong. He searched within his pockets and found a few matches. These he began to strike. The first one showed him the circular stairs leading downward from the Lady Abbess's room, and the others lighted his way to the bottom. He remembered the door at the foot of these stairs, and he unbolted it and stepped forth into the night.

The garden lay bathed in a mist of silver. The tall, red lilies were bent and weighted down with the moisture of the night. He listened. There was now no near sound, he heard only the distant whistle of a night train, and he stepped boldly out and descended the steps of the garden. The stars were shining overhead. He saw them twinkle through the moonlit mist. He saw the dim shape of the Abbey. He felt the cold dew of midnight on every blade and leaf that his sole crushed as he walked. He knew not where to go. The miller's family had never liked him, because of some real or fancied attentions which were

more than priestly toward Marie Monrouge, and he felt that Pierre might do him bodily violence if he should ask refuge at the mill. As Halle walked and thought, he stepped within the ruins. He started back fearfully, holy man that he was! for there, in a remote corner, was a figure in some sort of light drapery.

"Who is there?" he demanded, though his knees shook under him, proof positive that he could be no good Catholic.

"Sh-h-h!" A finger was raised as the ghostly whisper came through the mist. The figure advanced; Halle began to retreat.

"In the name of God, what are you?" he shouted.

There was an answering shout outside the ruins: "Trapped!"

"Oh, Father! Father! You have made a mistake. Fly! Fly! They are not gone."

As Marie Monrouge was speaking, Halle heard the sound of running feet. He turned and fled through the further door of the Abbey, and along on the top of the oubliette. There was the sound of hastening footsteps, and three men dashed through the archway and into the ruined interior. Marie Monrouge, transfixed with fright, was a sight which they did not expect. They all started back in dismay to see this pale, misty figure within the Abbey walls. Marie Monrouge was quick-witted. She thought to herself, "The longer I can persuade them that I am a spirit, the better for the Father."

She heard the sound of Halle's feet as he sped along outside the walls. She waved a ghostly arm, and the men drew back.

Finally one said: "Do you not hear the sound of

running feet? This is some lure. Come, let us go after him."

They faced about and ran, turning their backs upon the supposed spirit.

When Marie Monrouge found that she had had the effect of frightening the sergents de ville away, and that they had followed exactly in the priest's footsteps, she called in an agonizing voice:

"Messieurs! Messieurs! That is not the way. If you are looking for the Father, he has gone back through the garden, up there by the château. I saw him but now——"

But the pursuers had all passed out of the further archway and were beating the bush for their quarry. There, outside the walls, was an ancient grove, where the nuns used to walk, and the pursuers ran through the various paths, calling, and shouting, and ordering Halle to surrender. Finally, finding no one, they came out of the little wood and stood in consultation.

"I distinctly saw him as he crossed the flower garden," said one.

"Ah, ha! You were wise to take my advice, Chabrol," said another. "I knew that if we left the horses at the bend of the road and crept back on foot, we should have the villain."

"And now, which way?" asked a third.

"What is this grating?" said the first. He scratched a match and dropped it down. A scared white face, with deep-set eyes, looked up at him from its black depths.

"He is here! He is here!" said number two. "There! Do you not see him?" But the figure had disappeared from beneath the bell-shaped cover, or roof, of the cell, where it had been standing but a mo-

ment before. The police now began to scour the field to find the entrance to the hiding-place of the hunted man. He had been run to earth.

"They will have me," he groaned aloud. Suddenly, he bethought him of a passage where Gartha had crawled in one day, and had been drawn out nearly enveloped with spider's webs. Halle looked anxiously this way and that. There was no other method of escape. Now he saw a light at the end of the passage through which he had fled. In a moment they would be upon him. The light came nearer, he heard voices, the ray was creeping, creeping along the ground. Anything would be better than capture, death even! Halle crouched at the dark entrance, upon hands and knees; he heard his pursuers behind him, then crept head foremost into the hole. Their lantern shed its beams a short distance, and then was lost in the darkness of the tunnel. He crawled on and on. Slimy toads squeaked and hopped aside. His head was pushed through great cobwebs which had not been disturbed for generations; once something sinuous and long glided over his hand. Once his palm was laid upon a bone. He grasped it. It felt like the bone of a human being. An awful terror seized him. The place smelt of the charnel house. He fell upon his face, and as he fell, he clutched a round thing. His fingers were forced into a cavity; he knew that it was a skull; he could have sworn that the teeth had closed upon his hand. The terrors of the place were great, but nothing to the horrors that he was leaving behind. He heard a shout, a muffled shout, for his crawling figure nearly closed up the passage. What if one of them, smaller than the rest, should try to follow him? What if he should be

crawling close behind with his bayonet? What if he should shoot him through the body as he pushed slowly and helplessly forward? He endeavored to turn himself about, but the passage was too narrow for that, and he realized at once that he could never return unless he could manage to push himself backward, feet first. As he crawled, his mouth and nostrils were filled with the dust of decay; hairy creatures crossed his hands, or fell upon his head, and wriggled their way amidst his hair or across his neck. But this, even this, was better than being taken alive, and he pushed on. Once he felt a sharp, stinging pain; then heard a distant report.

Ah! they were shooting at him then! Helpless as he was, caged in this narrow, stifling cylinder, should he turn, of what avail? He would be shot in the face, and then, when his dead body lay before her, and she looked down upon him—No, no! better push on. The place was getting stifling, something was pouring down over his eyes, dripping in front of him. His hands were wet. Ah! the bullet had struck him then. The thought made him faint, ill. He had always fainted at the sight of blood. He thought that he could smell it. He turned on his side, sick and dizzy. Was not there an opening further on? He had heard that this passageway had been built as a means of escape to the river, for use in the old times when the cloister had been attacked. Here, it was said, the gentle sisters had taken refuge. It was dark! So dark! He turned a little more, and felt with his fingers overhead. Yes, the low roof was arched, and ceiled with the same small stones which lined the entrance. If men had done this work, they must have been able to get out in some way. He turned again upon his

face, raised his head and looked forward. All was black. He sought in vain for some faintest ray of daylight to show that the passage opened into the outer air. He fancied that he saw it. No, it was only the sparks of light dancing before his eyes. Something rustled behind him. Had one of those servants of the law come thus far after him? Should they have a hand-to-hand fight in the passage? He would be at a disadvantage, for he could not turn. Was the passage growing smaller, or was this a sudden faintness which was overcoming him? Something rustled again. Halle made a thrust with his foot. The unseen thing ran over his body, and set small, sharp teeth within the palm of his hand. The tortured being crawled on for a few paces; then a dreadful nausea overcame him, and he sank down, his head resting upon a heap of bones—the bones, perhaps, of some other creature who had been hunted to the death.

XLV.

When Valery reached the Abbey, he was met by Alixe at the grille which opened upon the terrace. Her face was pale, her eyes were hollow.

"Valery," she said, "you must take us away at once."

"Take you away, and where to?"

"Anywhere! I care not, only so that I leave this place!"

"And Gartha?"

"The doctor says that with care she can travel."

"Where will you go, Alixe?"

"I have no choice. Anywhere! Anywhere!" And then Alixe told her brother-in-law of the priest's visit on the previous night, of the visits of the soldiers, their return, as Marie Monrouge had told it to her, and her belief that Halle had been taken or killed.

"If he has been taken," said Valery, "he probably deserves it."

"Oh! Valery. Do you really mean it? You cannot think him guilty of so grave a crime. I suppose that I should go to the dear Archbishop's funeral, but Gartha——"

"You have no need to go," said Valery, smiling.

"No? Oh, Valery! You do not mean——"

"Yes, I do mean. I do mean that he is not dead,

and there is a very good chance for his recovery. How soon can you be ready, Alixe?"

"This moment, this afternoon. I——"

"I cannot go until to-morrow, Alixe. There are one or two things that I must see to in Paris. Mamasha—" He stopped. He would not destroy the daughter's faith in the mother too entirely.

"What of my mother, Valery?"

"Would—would you—I was only thinking that you might wish to see her——"

"No, Valery, no! I wish only to get away with Gartha. Only with Gartha. The poor little thing is so sallow and thin. More of a brownie than ever!"

"You don't mind my going along as baby-tender and trunk-strapper, I suppose?"

Alixe smiled faintly.

"There, now! You look more like your old self, little sister!"

At this Alixe smiled again, as she gave Valery a level look from her splendid height.

"Very well, then, I'll go up and have a look at Gartha, and be off to Paris by the next train. Whom will you take with you?"

"Marie Monrouge," said Alixe. "Gartha is devoted to Marie Monrouge."

There was a ring at the gate. Alixe and Valery retreated to the salon, Valery running up-stairs to Alixe's room, where Gartha was sitting on a couch, putting together a map of Africa.

"Oh, Valery, dear!" said the child, "I am trying so hard to learn all about the places where you have been. I hate puzzles and geography, but Alixe thought it would be of an amusement, and she sent for a puzzle map of Africa. Regardez, Valery! The

land won't go in anywhere, and the Boers are always on top."

"Faith, you'll always find 'em on top!" said Valery, from his standpoint of Irish prejudice. A prediction which has not been fulfilled. "Do you want to go away?"

"No, not peticly," said Gartha, "but if Alixe wants me to, je m'en bats l'œil." Valery looked a trifle solemn at this outrageous slang, but how could he correct her now?

"So you like the map?"

"C'est épatant! The artist-peintre of Marie Monrouge, he teached me that C'est épatant!" and Gartha laughed. "Are you coming with us, Papachen?"

"Oh, yes, I'm going to be bandbox-carrier to your two majesties."

This made Gartha laugh again.

There was a knock at the door. It was Marie Monrouge. Her appearance resembled that of the rest of the human beings about the establishment. She was wild-eyed and frightened. "Does not Marie Monrouge appear ridicule?" asked Gartha. "She was at the Abbey all the last night playing at ghosts. One of these revenants. Oh! how I wish I had saw her. I never saw a revenant."

"Madame la Duchesse sends me to say, monsieur, that a young monsieur is below waiting to speak with you."

"Who the devil can have followed me here?" exclaimed Valery.

He ran down the stairs and found Alixe in conversation with a lad about eight years of age.

"Why! Holà, Jan! How are you? Where did you come from?"

"How do you do, Mr. Valery? I came from Ireland, really, but I got taken past the station yesterday, down into the south of France, and had to get out, and come back on another train. How is Gartha, Mr. Valery?"

"Right as rain, as my prospective father-in-law would say. Have you come to see Gartha?"

"Yes, Mr. Valery," said Jan MacDonald, looking down with becoming embarrassment. "I heard she has been hurt and was very ill. I should have been here a week ago, but my allowance had given out, and I had to wait for Uncle Jack's next check."

"So Quentin keeps you pretty short, does he?"

"No, sir," said the lad, "but he didn't expect me to come to France. I had to borrow all of Elsie, my cousin's, allowance, and Ann Macune's wages. Ann Macune is fond of Gartha—she was willing——"

"Who isn't, Jan? Even the poor old Weasel. Come up-stairs."

Alixe rose and came toward the lad.

"Do you mean that you are Mr. Quentin's nephew?" she asked. She laid her hands on Jan's shoulders and looked down into the fresh young face.

"Yes, Madame, I am Jan. When can I see Gartha?"

"I will go and tell her that you are here," said Alixe. "Let me go, Valery, and bring Jan up when Marie Monrouge comes for you."

"Nom de Dieu! I thought some of my lovers might be coming," said Gartha, when she heard that Jan had arrived. "Do not you know that song Mary Thorndike used to sing, when she used to puff and blow all the music off the piano, Alixe, about the dying girl listening for her lover? I have been listening

just like that all the day. The doctor may say that I am well, dear aunt, but I am not getting strong. I am thin and pale, and my food sits heavy on my stomach."

"I should think it might," said Valery, who was mounting the stairs, not waiting for the summons, "if what I have seen you eat this morning is a sample. Here's Jan, Gartha. Come all the way from the Scotch-Irish border to see my little girl."

Gartha, taken unaware, lay hurriedly back among the pillows. She managed to give her eyes an extremely hollow look; she drew her lips tightly over her teeth; she panted as if it were difficult to get her breath; she laid a wan and weary hand outside the shawl which covered her thin little legs, and when Alixe looked at it, she found that it was trembling like a leaf. The other was as steady as usual.

"How do you do, Jan?" said Gartha, in a weak, faint voice. "Cher ami, how I have longed for you."

At this fervent speech Jan looked up, then down. His embarrassment was so great that he stood in the middle of the room unable to move. There was a choking sound from the far corner of the room, where Valery leaned out of the window. All that could be seen of his neck was very red; his great shoulders were shaking convulsively.

"Do not weep, dear father," said Gartha, anxiously. "I am going to a brighter and better home. I hear the angels, les anges, calling on the moment."

At this fine speech Jan MacDonald gave one look at Gartha's drawn lips and hollow eyes, and burst into a passion of sobs.

"Gartha," said Alixe, "how can you! See poor Jan! Sit up and behave yourself."

"Do not weep, dear Jan," said Gartha. "Come nearer and let me wipe your tears with my dear aunt's handkerchief. There is one request that I want to make to you, Jan."

Jan's crying was so loud that it drowned Valery's laughter.

"You know the white, white rose that grows within the Abbey yonder, dear, dearest Jan."

"Don't know nothin' 'bout your old Abbey," roared Jan, sobbing louder than ever. Gartha sighed with pious resignation.

"Nom de Dieu!" she said, gazing heavenward, "but not to know my rose. My dear aunt will show you where it is when I am gone. Go to that bush——"

By this time Jan had thrown himself upon the floor by the side of the couch, and was sobbing his boyish heart out upon Gartha's still trembling hand.

"You—you said you was goin' to grow up an'—an' —mar—mar—ry—me," sobbed Jan, "and now you're —you're—goin'—to—die. You—you—'re—a be—heast!"

Gartha withdrew her hand from beneath Jan's wet face, and laid it, still shaking, on his curly head, remembering suddenly a scene which she had gloated over in one of Marie Monrouge's tales.

"I could not marry you, dear Jan," she said, "if I would. I am pre—pre—engage to your uncle."

"He's—he's—a beast, too," roared Jan.

Gartha sat up in bed, and held up one warning finger toward Jan.

"Ta bouche! Bébé Rose," she exclaimed with the proper gutturals. "Ta bouche!"

"Gartha! Gartha!"

Gartha, on hearing Valery's remonstrative tones, looked sweetly up in his eyes.

"Tu parles! Charles, tu parles!"

"Gartha!" It was Alixe whose horrified tones were heard now above Jan's sobbings.

"Mamasha says it. I heard her say it to Harry Ware."

"Come, now, Gartha, come down from your high horse and show Jan your puzzle map of Africa."

Poor Jan arose from his lowly position by Gartha's bedside. He was very angry, as well as much mortified, at being made a medium to amuse the grown-ups. He turned forlornly toward the door, his tears almost dried.

"Don't quarrel with the little girl, Jan," called Valery. "You know she's somewhat fond of acting. She's all right now, and I hope you'll forget and forgive."

Jan stood sulkily in the middle distance.

"V'la les Anglish," piped Gartha, who seemed to be in her most vicious mood. Then, perceiving from Valery's looks that she had gone too far, she hastily added: "Le Rire says it!"

"So you read Le Rire," commented Valery dryly. "Your education seems to be getting its finishing touches."

"The artist-peintre sends it to Marie Monrouge," explained Gartha. "We read it at the mill while Mère Monrouge knits. She clicks her tongue and says, 'Si j'étais encore jeune!' She lived in the Quartier, when she was gosse."

Valery left Jan at the Abbey, and took the afternoon train for Paris. His last words were, "I shall

come back to-morrow, all ready for a trip to the moon, if you say so."

Valery, however, did not keep his promise. When he got to Paris, he found Quentin sitting in his rooms, where he had arrived soon after Valery had left them.

"Have you heard the news?" asked Quentin."

"It never rains but it pours," said Valery. "Let's have it. There can't be worse or more of it than I have heard already."

"What! What!" stammered Quentin. "Is Madame, is Alixe——"

"They are all right at the Abbey," said Valery. "What is your news?"

"Haven't you seen the morning papers?" asked Quentin.

"Haven't looked at a paper to-day. Had no time. Don't get 'em at the Abbey. Been on the keen jump all day! Not Mamasha! The dear old lady hasn't slipped up on Eldon, has she?"

"Nothing so trivial as that," said Quentin. "It's about St. Aubin——"

"St. Aubin!" repeated Valery. "St. Aubin! What has he been doing? Not robbing a bank?"

"Worse than that! LE FIGARO says that he has killed himself."

"Oh, no, no, Quentin. Try something else. St. Aubin isn't that kind. Tell me that——"

"I think it must be true," said Quentin. "The account is very circumstantial——"

"Why should he kill himself?" asked Valery, in an awe-struck voice.

"Read the account, it is all there." Quentin handed Valery the journal. He carried it to the window, for the light was waning, and read a few lines.

"Quentin," he said, turning to the other, "go down at once and telegraph in my name to the station at Moncousis. Tell them not to send the papers to the Abbey to-day or to-morrow—in fact, not until I come. Please go at once."

Quentin was out of the door and half-way down the stairs before Valery had finished his instructions.

Then Valery stood by the window and read the dreadful story of how a small, dark stranger had driven to the wharf of a great ocean steamship, behind the dray that held his boxes. He kept them in sight every moment, was everywhere among the draymen at the wharf, ordering that the boxes be removed with great care. They were packed with valuable and brittle glass, he said, and the least jar might break them. None of the boxes was heavy but one. This, the last one to be removed by the men, was slowly drawn along the bottom of the dray and rested on the extreme edge. At that moment the wharf-master shouted:

"What are you doing with those boxes? They do not belong here. Take them down to the other gangway!"

"These are my boxes," said the stranger. "This box is to go into my stateroom."

"It is too high for a stateroom," said the wharf-master.

"It is to go into my stateroom," repeated the stranger persistently, as if unused to contradiction.

"Hi, there, you men, push that box back into the wagon. Take it down the wharf to the other gangway," said the wharf-master crossly.

The men turned to listen to the altercation. One had released his hold; the other felt the box slipping,

and fearing that it would fall upon his foot, sprang out of the way. He might as well have remained, for at that moment there was a terrific explosion. He was blown to a thousand atoms. Another, the drayman, was killed, and several of the police were knocked senseless.

The stranger, on seeing the explosion, ran on board the steamer, and down below into his stateroom. It was on the lower tier. There was the sound of a pistol shot. They found him lying on the floor, bleeding profusely and past all help. He died as they lifted him to the bed. "It is impossible that it was St. Aubin," said Valery aloud. "He always travels so luxuriously. He always took a deck cabin." But on reading further, he began to see light through the darkness. Suspicion had already been aroused, and the busy police and journalists were at work probing the matter to the bottom. The box was found to contain a complicated mass of the most ingeniously constructed mechanism, to which men had given the most pertinent of names, that of infernal machine. Different parts of it were picked up on the wharf where they had fallen, and enough was found to prove that this was the devilish plan of a devil's nature.

The body of the stranger had been identified by one of the Paris police, who had been sent to investigate the affair, as that of the Count St. Aubin. Then came forward the insurance company, who told the tale of the box having been insured lately with them, for a very large amount, by the Count St. Aubin. It was to be shipped on the steamer of that same date. In scanning their books they discovered that something of the same kind had been done before. They

found that the Count St. Aubin had insured other boxes for like large sums of money. The insurance had invariably been paid, for the steamers in which the boxes had been shipped had never been heard from!

"Virginia Danielli!" muttered Valery to himself, shaking his head. "Virginia Danielli!" He sat down by the window and tried to reason it all out. Bruno was not contemplating an ocean voyage, of this he felt certain. He had gone to the German port to sail for Southampton. He had taken a room as near the bottom of the ship as possible. Had it been part of his plan to leave the steamer at Southampton, and leave the box behind in that room in the bowels of the vessel? "Oh, my God!" exclaimed Valery. "Set, probably, so that it would explode within a given time." Then he read from the journal this sentence: "A box had been deposited on the 10th of August on board the Ocean Monarch, and insured at the company's office by the Count St. Aubin."

Quentin found Valery walking up and down the room with his hands to his head.

"I don't know what to do, Quentin," he said. "Should I go and claim that yellow little carcass, or should I go back and take Alixe away?"

"Go and take her away, for God's sake," said Quentin. "I will see to the burial, just as if you were here."

"You remember how they talked of his emotion when Virginia Danielli was lost? I should think he would have shown emotion! He didn't care a rap for Virginia; was rather jealous of the affection which Alixe showed for her, in fact; but I know he was sur-

prised to find that she was going on that steamer. That time, perhaps, he had sent his box before him. It may have been on a bill of lading. It may have been put in the hold; and perhaps he was afraid to ask again for its return, for fear of giving the whole game away. I don't know much about such things, thank God! He may have ordered it put on board in Southampton, and not have been able to stop the thing. Perhaps his tool, Halle, was over there, and got the box started before Bruno could stop him. A nice pair of murderers, trafficking in human blood! It makes me physically sick," and Valery promptly began to show how his feelings had overcome him, for, strong man as he was, he tumbled over in a heap on the sofa.

"And about the papers, Quentin?" asked Valery, when he recovered himself.

"Oh, at Moncousis? They answered, that the journals for some reason had failed to arrive to-day, and that they would keep them at the station, and not send them on to the Abbey, until further orders."

"And so you will bury the brute!" said Valery. "If I had my way, I'd throw his little yellow carcass into a hole with a lot of quicklime, the more the better."

"I will do what I can," said Quentin. He tried to think. He found it difficult to collect his thoughts. How should he proceed? When should he start—where should he——

The door burst open. It was Madame.

"Valery, have you heard the news?" Madame was crying, and the tears made little roads down her cheeks, and great inroads upon her complexion.

"Yes, I've heard," answered Valery gloomily.

"Eldon hasn't come," said Mamasha. "I wonder if he will give me up for that. I can't imagine it. I am no relative to Bruno, that âme damnée! At least, he was only my sister's child, and——"

"If Eldon doesn't give you up for something else, Mamasha, he won't for this," said Valery.

"What do you mean, Valery?" Madame turned all colors.

"You know what I mean. I've lodged a complaint before the juge de paix. You'll excuse our talking family matters, Quentin——"

"I'll go away," said Quentin, looking much distressed. "I had better go away—I have much to see to——"

"If you are going after that malefactor, Mr. Quentin," began Madame, "if you condone that crime énorme——"

"I am going, at Mr. Valery's request, to take charge of the body and bury it——" He turned to Valery. "Where?" he said. "I know not where."

"You need not think of bringing him to the Abbey, Mr. Quentin. I will not have him lie beside my dear General, and my little Allaire——"

"You're right for the first time in your life, Mamasha," said Valery, "only where else but there?"

"Where, then?" asked Quentin, in his turn, facing Madame. "Has his wife no voice in the matter?"

"She won't know anything about it," said Madame, who, for once, agreed with her son-in-law.

"As you say," said Quentin, "certainly; but she may hold me accountable later."

"She can't," said Valery. "I am going to take her to Africa to-morrow."

"To Africa!" gasped Quentin.

"Yes. She and Gartha and I. She told me to tell you that you could have the Abbey if you wish it, Mamasha."

"It will be the best place to go," said Madame. "I should not dare to face them all in England just at present. Please, dear Valery, and you, Mr. Quentin, when any one asks you what the relationship was between me and Bruno, say a very distant one."

"Every one knows that he was your son-in-law," said Valery.

"Hum!" said Madame, looking down and tapping her foot on the floor.

"And most people know that you married your daughter to him against her will."

"Oh, no, Valery, dear; Alixe was perfectly willing."

"Yes, because you told her that poor Bruno had no money, and that only in that way could she share her fortune with him. See how he has squandered it."

"Yes, it was an unsuccessful experiment, I own. But later, she may be able to feel un grand bien s'ensuivit de tant de maux."

"And what are you going to do, Mr. Quentin?" Madame had not seen herself since her tears had dried, or she could not have so calmly faced her sometime love.

"I am going to obey Valery's orders," said Quentin, "and then—I don't know." A blank wall loomed up before Quentin.

"We've got your young nephew down at the Abbey, Quentin. Do you mind if we take him along with us? It's a great thing for Gartha."

"Jan at the Abbey? How did he get there?"

Valery explained, and Quentin acceded to Valery's request only too gladly. Jan's going with Valery

and his charges would be a bond, and Quentin determined to write to his nephew much more often than he had been in the habit of doing. The question was, would the lad reply? Boys are so careless—he must write him a stern letter—give him a large allowance, perhaps—but no—that was not the right way to win a lad's——

"You will come, dear friend?"

It was Madame's voice.

"Come? Come to what?"

Quentin had been brought back to the realities of life by Madame's sweet voice.

"Why, to the Abbey. I expect Eldon to-day, and after our marriage, I think we had better go there for a while. I shall go home at once and write to the Baron and Baroness——"

"The Baron is sitting right down here in front of Maxim's," said Valery, "I saw him as I came along."

"You can't expect me to go down to Maxim's and say, 'Baron, will you come to the Abbey for a visit?' I will write to her, and to the Jenkins girls, and Mary Thorndike, and Lady Barnes, and Ada Spencer, and —you will come, too, dear friend?"

"I—I—hardly know. I must first attend to—to——"

Quentin stopped short. His feelings revolted against going to the Abbey just after the dreadful task that he had set himself to perform. And then, too, why should he go when the charm would be removed?

XLVI.

Valery's man was packing his belongings, but the day was not long enough for all that he had to do. He sent constant telegrams to Alixe, telling her how matters were progressing, and on the third day he arrived at the Abbey. There he slept one night, and the following day saw the party of four on its way to Africa.

Valery and Quentin had decided that it would not do to keep Alixe in ignorance of St. Aubin's death.

"But I shan't tell her," said Valery, "until the little beast—I mean, Bruno—is buried, for she would think it proper to appear at the funeral, and then the whole thing would come out. Of course the world knows all the details, or will; but if we can keep it from Alixe for a while, that is all that I hope for."

Alixe had said to Valery, several times, that it was strange that she had not heard from Bruno. He had never been so long without writing. She feared that she had been too harsh with him, etc., etc.

Valery parried the questions as best he could until they were on board the steamer, sailing for Cape Town. Alixe had been confined to her cabin for several days with a racking headache. That was not the time to tell her, and Valery, biding his time, waited until one bright morning in the tropics. She was sitting on deck, gazing with all the ardor of a romantic

girl at the trade-wind clouds, and picturing many charming scenes to her own satisfaction.

"See, Valery," she said, "there is the Archbishop. Do you not see his robes? See how he holds out his arms to me, as if he were begging me to return and take the vows that I almost promised him I would take. Ah! had I but seen him before I left home."

"That was not possible, Alixe," said Valery. "The physicians would allow no one to see him. You contributed to his recovery by remaining away. The excitement would have been too much for him."

"And there is the Abbey. Do you see it, Valery?"

Valery looked toward the white spot against the blue on which the eyes of Alixe were fixed.

"It certainly does look like the ruins," said he, "that is, to us. There is a horse-dealer over there, who, I suppose, would insist that it looks like a drove of animals, and that publisher would say that it looks like a pile of books. Some Parisian would declare that it was the exact counterpart of the Arc de l'Étoile. So it goes. One always sees that of which he is thinking, in the trade-wind clouds."

Alixe sat, still gazing at what to her seemed an exact representation of the Abbey. Finally she turned, and spoke as if with difficulty. It was as if the question must be asked and answered before she could have peace of mind.

"Has Robert Halle ever returned, Valery?"

"No," said Valery. "I hear that they have proof positive that it was he who attacked the Archbishop." Alixe was silent. Valery had expected a violent disclaimer. "I am surprised at you, Alixe! I thought that you were more loyal to Halle!" Alixe was still silent. "It seems terrible to think that one who has

lived with us as a boy and man could conceive such a dreadful act and try to carry it out." Still Alixe did not answer. She was thinking, as she had almost every moment since it had occurred, of that dreadful look which Halle had given her, of his stretching out his dark, bony hands, of the step which he took toward her. The thought brought upon her almost a physical sickness. To think of it even was terrifying, and Valery's words brought the scene before her so vividly, that scene which she was endeavoring so desperately to forget, that she turned her face and hid it in her hands.

"Don't speak of him again, Valery," she said. "Do not! I cannot bear it."

"You brought it upon yourself, Alixe."

"I—I—wanted to know, certainly. I thought I could——"

Valery stood looking at her in amazement. Her shoulders were shaking in a nervous tremor. Her voice, when she spoke, was faint.

"You never told me anything to make me think that you did not wish him spoken of, Alixe. The morning that I came to the Abbey post haste from Paris, you only said——"

"Valery, do not! I tell you I cannot bear it."

Valery kept silent for a space. He was puzzled. Then he repeated: "You asked me, Alixe."

"Yes, I asked you. It was my fault. I thought myself stronger. What of Bruno? I have not heard from Bruno lately."

"Did—do you and he keep up such a violent correspondence?" asked Valery.

"N—no." Alixe smiled faintly. "But I generally know where he is. I know that I must have angered

him greatly. Not with the talk of my going into a convent, but in other ways. He was never silent so long before. I suppose, when we return, he will come back to the Abbey. Do you think so?"

"I hardly know," said Valery. "How Gartha has improved! Do you notice it, Alixe?"

"Dear little soul!" said Alixe. "Gartha is my mainstay. If anything serious should happen to Gartha—" Alixe's eyes were full of tears. "Of what are you thinking?"

Valery was looking at her fixedly.

"Alixe, I have some bad news for you."

Alixe sat upright. "Not Gartha?" she said.

"Gartha! Do you suppose that I should have stood gossiping here about Halle, if anything had happened to Gartha? There she is, leaning over the rail with Jan. No, Alixe, it is about some one else. You asked me about Bruno. You wish to know?"

The cheek of Alixe had regained its color. It was plain to Valery that Bruno had never been to Alixe what Gartha was at that moment.

"Certainly I wish to know. What is it?"

"Alixe, what would you say if I told you that Bruno is very ill?"

"And you brought me away from France! Oh! Valery, I who should be there to nurse him. That is my duty. What is the nearest port? How soon can I get there? How far is it? I have money, have I not? Enough to persuade them to put into the nearest port?"

"What would you say if I told you that Bruno is dead, Alixe?"

"Dead! How could you get the news! How could you—Do you mean to say—Valery! Valery! Do you

mean to say that you knew this before we left the Abbey, and never told me?"

"Yes, Alixe, I mean to say that very thing."

"Oh, Valery! How heartless! How cruel! I who should have been the first to fly to his bedside, I who should have been with him when he died. For Bruno loved me—in his way—yes, in his way—" The tears were coursing down her face. She turned toward the rail, that the inquisitive promenaders might not notice her distress. Valery lowered the umbrella, so that no one could see the evidence of her grief.

"I did not think it of you, Valery. Poor Bruno! He once told me that he could not die unless I closed his eyes. I was hard upon him, I fear; but I did not love him as I should have done. It was I who made him cross sometimes, and captious. An unloving wife!—but,"—she turned toward Valery, her eyes raining floods of tears,—"I did not love him. I never should have allowed myself to be persuaded to marry him, never. I was not old enough to judge—I——"

"The trail of Mamasha!" said Valery. "Mamasha has spoiled several dozens of horns, and I can't see that she has made any spoons to speak of, unless she hooked Eldon at the last. I don't want to spoil her little game, so I never let Eldon into the skeleton closet at the Abbey. If I had——"

"Don't speak so," said Alixe, still sobbing. "My mother has been a disappointed woman all her life. She never succeeded quite in what she undertook. I disappointed her——"

"Faith, then," said Valery, "you did your best not to, when you married the old duke——"

"He was very kind to me. He might still have been kind as my husband. The poor duke did not realize anything from his marriage with me. He died and left me a rich woman. I should be grateful and——"

"If Mamasha had planned it, and had had the taking of him off, it couldn't have been better done." Alixe smiled faintly through her tears. She was accustomed to Valery.

"Tell me the rest. Where was Bruno?"

"It was a sudden attack." Valery was determined not to tell her any of the circumstances. "It was just as he was going to take the steamer. He did not miss you, Alixe. It was all over in a moment."

"Thank God for that! And—and—were you at the—the funeral, Valery?"

"God forbid!" he ejaculated fervently. "I—I—mean——"

Alixe was staring at him in surprise. "I—I—mean I—I—couldn't get there. I—I had so much, you—you—know, to do, and I—I——"

"Valery, what does all this stammering mean? Tell me at once!" Alixe was sitting upright now. "If you, the only person who could attend to it, turned your back on Bruno, who was there to see that the poor fellow was buried as befitted his position? Who was there to——"

"Quentin attended to it," said Valery humbly.

A faint flush came to the cheek of Alixe.

"Mr. Quentin! And what had he to do with it, when you, my nearest relative—it is strange what a small family we have, Valery, how few there are to take any interest. Had the Archbishop not been so ill, had Halle——"

"The Archbishop wouldn't have touched him with the tongs——"

"Valery! Valery! He is dead. Bruno is dead! Do not speak so of him."

"The church has nothing to do with suicides, Alixe, as you know well," blurted out Valery. He had hardly spoken before he could have bitten his tongue for his hastiness.

"Suicide! Suicide! Do you mean to tell me that Bruno killed himself?"

"Did—did—I say that?" Valery perceived at once the mischief that he had done all in a moment, and the far-reaching effect of it.

"Yes! yes! You said suicide! Oh, Valery, Valery! That Bruno should kill himself, and all because I could not love him. All because I could not and never have lived with him as his wife should do. Oh, dear, dear God! What shall I do? What shall I do? To have this sin on my conscience. This dreadful, dreadful sin. Can a whole life of penance atone?"

"Now don't ask any more; just enjoy yourself while you may."

"Enjoy myself! And my mother?"

"I suppose she went to the Abbey; I know Eldon came over to Paris on the third."

"The very day you heard the news?"

"Yes, Mamasha came to see me about it in the morning. She was bathed in tears. Eldon arrived at about one o'clock, and she wiped her weeping eyes, as the Salvation Army used to sing to us out at the Rand, put on a little more rouge, got her special dispensation from the Pope, and her social dispensations from the world, the flesh, and the devil, espe-

cially the latter—but I believe Eldon had attended to all that beforehand, and was married by 4 P.M. There's nothing money can't do, Alixe, and that you'll find out when you have given it all to the church, and haven't any more to conjure with."

"It cannot save a soul," said Alixe. "Oh, poor Bruno! Poor Bruno!"

Alixe arose and staggered along the deck to her own cabin. Valery followed, penitent and downcast. When she reached the cabin, which was on the upper deck, she went in and closed the door very decidedly in Valery's face. He was haunted all night by the look in those eyes which had gazed at him, for the first time since he had known her, with reproach amounting almost to anger.

Valery did not see Alixe for several days. She kept herself closely locked within her cabin. Gartha confided to Jan the cause of this behavior on Alixe's part. "Valery says that my Uncle Bruno is dead. You know I always hated my Uncle Bruno——"

"There is a proverb that says, 'Say nothing but good of the dead,'" said Jan MacDonald.

"Nom de Dieu! Je le crois bien! Then we should never be able to speak of my Uncle Bruno again. The worst of it is, he killed himself, une blessure mortelle, you must know. I think it was because his chemicals esploded and nearly killed me. He was pobaly afraid that your uncle, to whom I am promis, you know, would go after him and give him what Harry Ware used to call 'peticlar fits,' so he killed himself."

"Does the Duchesse know that he killed himself?"

"Yes," said Gartha, "and the most amusing thing of all is, that she thinks he killed himself for love of

her. Quelle bêtise! John Quentin himself buried him because he was my uncle. It was kind of John Quentin. He knows how I hated my Uncle Bruno. L'histoire est extrêmement intéressante, depuis le commencement jusqu'à la fin."

"Don't, Gartha." Jan was shocked at this free-spoken young woman. "You must not speak so. Why don't you go and see if you can comfort your aunt a little?"

Gartha, in accordance with this suggestion, crept to the cabin door, and tried the lock. It would not open.

"Who is there?" called Alixe faintly.

"C'est moi, chère tante," called Gartha, loud enough for a young commis voyageur who was going out to Cape Town to hear. "Your own little Gartha. Can I do something for you, chérie? Something to soften this great and overwhelming esperience?"

The door was opened a little way. Gartha had her head over her shoulder to see if her listener had taken in her last words and their gentle purport. She had the great satisfaction to find that he was all eyes and probably all ears. She wished that Alixe had not responded quite so quickly as the tail of her eye showed her that she had. But her head was turned toward the attentive stranger, and there was time for one effective sentence.

"Do not weep, dear aunt," she said in her most heavenly tone, the corner of her eye still taking in the travelling salesman. "My dear uncle, âme blanche that he was, has gone to that land where we shall meet him, too, some day. He is looking down and watching over us now, and pobaly blessing us; and every tear we sheds makes his kind heart beat the

faster, every sigh we heaves is to him an embarrass des richesses. Spend your tears on the little ones that you have lost, but not on my sainted Uncle Bruno, the Comte de St. Aubin!" At these final words, the commis voyageur opened his eyes very wide; at which sign of interest Gartha could not resist adding: "Chère Duchesse di Brazzia, sans la religion nous serions pires que les barbares!" and disappeared within the door.

Alixe, whose face had been buried within the folds of her cloak, and who had heard nothing of Gartha's play-acting, opened her arms to the child and held her close, so close that Gartha feared that she should smother. She managed to keep her eye on the window, however, and was satisfied to see that the young man was gazing at the closed door through which she had passed, open-mouthed.

From this time forth Valery could see that there was a great struggle going on in the mind of Alixe. She sat often lost in deep fits of abstraction. She did not speak when spoken to, and seemed to be planning a future with which no one could interfere. He chuckled quietly in silent communion with himself. "She's a widow now, sure enough. A widow firm and fast. She has never been a wife. She is thinking of Quentin. I can see that she wants to hasten home. There must be something in all this. When I mention his name she winces and shivers, and looks appealingly at me, perfectly oblivious all the time of what she is doing."

XLVII.

Quentin accepted Lady Eldon's invitation, and went down to the Abbey during the last days of November. Paris was bright and sunny, but the country was bare and chill. There was no one to meet him at the little station, and he walked over the road to the Abbey as he had done before. The scene was changed past belief. The autumn rains had wetted the ground, the fields were bare and brown, the trees were almost stripped of foliage, and there were masses of dingy, yellow leaves in the gutters by the roadside. As he strode onward he could not believe it the same road over which a little more than a year ago he had passed, a stranger, and found something awaiting him of which he had not dreamed. He cast a glance upward toward the hill. The great sentinels of the forest stood as of old, bare and sturdy. They waved their ragged branches in the gusts of wind that swept through them, and seemed to call down the slope: "Go back! Go back! She is not here! She is not here!" His glance scanned the distant hilltop, and he thought that he could single out the very tree which he had climbed to scan the country the first morning after his arrival at the Abbey, and he made up his mind that during this visit he would go and look again upon the white stone which bore the name of Allaire, because she was the sister of Alixe, and because Alixe had placed it in the glade. He wondered quizzically

if Madame occupied her time now in "digging the moss out of the title," as Valery had said. He determined to mount the path and see for himself on some early day. Arrived at the gate, it was opened by a new, stiff English butler, whom Quentin followed across the terrace. He glanced sidewise in the direction of the châlet; but there was no one sitting at the long table, there were no lights, no gay voices. A slight flurry of snow had appeared, and was whirling around his head. The salon doors were closed. The butler ushered him into a little room upon the left, and there he waited in the dark until the man could light a lamp and announce his arrival. There was a faint glow from the fireplace, where a log was smouldering, and Quentin stood with his feet upon the fender until the butler came with a lamp, and told him that he would announce his coming to Lady Eldon. It was not long before there was a gentle rustling of skirts, and my lady came in. Madame was rather changed, grown a little stouter and a little redder in the face, and a great deal more effusive.

She came bustling toward him, and held out her hands across a chasm of forgetfulness. "You dear!" she said, taking Quentin's own. His thoughts instantly reverted to the first evening in the châlet, and he laughingly said:

"Mamasha, Mamasha, how do you do? How are you all, Mamasha?" shaking her hands up and down the while, embarrassed somewhat now as then.

"You are a godsend," said my lady, "a perfect godsend! Eldon has a crick in his back and groans about no French house being fit for a human being to live in. It is a draughty place in winter——"

"It isn't winter yet," said Quentin.

"It has been abnormally cold. We can hardly keep warm. I was never so cold at the Towers when I stayed there. It is true, as Eldon says, they don't know anything over here about being comfortable; but, of course, no one ever expected to stay here in winter. Come, sit down here. Sellers, some more wood. Do make it warm. See that Mr. Quentin's things are put in the châlet, and tell Pierre Monrouge to keep his fire going. Take plenty of wood over there."

"Pierre Monrouge takes no orders from me, my lady," said Sellers, bowing stiffly.

"Oh dear, oh dear! Nothing but quarrelling! Send Pierre Monrouge here, and I will tell him myself. I might have known that French and English servants would never agree. Les domestiques sont des gens fatigants. You spoke of——"

"The châlet?" said Quentin in surprise. "I thought that the châlet was——"

"Well, so it was," answered Lady Eldon, "but Alixe had it repaired; and though the rooms on Bruno's side are somewhat changed, yours are just as they were. How strange it all seems!"

Lady Eldon mused with her elbow on her knee, her cheek on her hand; upon her fingers there were some very magnificent rings, which flashed in the lamplight. Lord Eldon had indeed "put butter on her paws."

"You see I wear it always," said she, sentimentally, holding out the other hand toward Quentin, and bringing into view a very handsome bracelet, set with brilliant stones. "For a long time I did not know who sent it. One of my loveliest presents. You must have spent a fortune for it."

"I can never repay you," said Quentin earnestly, "for what you have done for me."

Madame, as Quentin must still call her in his mind, laid her hand in his and pressed it tenderly. Valery had called her a cat, a little cat. She was greedy; she might have been arrested for forgery; she had always repudiated every one who stood in her way; but yet she was a pleasant little cat, a soft, purring little cat, and she purred contentedly as she sat there with Quentin in the blaze of the renovated fire.

"I had a dreadful time to get people to come here," she confided to Quentin. "The Baroness wouldn't have come a step if she hadn't been so poor. That wretched little man has dissipated almost everything, himself first and foremost. He still sits in front of Maxim's—inside, I suppose, now, if the weather is as cold as it is here, and drinks his absinthe and gallops onward down the hill to paresis, while the poor little Baroness hasn't a rag to her back, or wouldn't have, if I hadn't given her a bundle of clothes that Alixe left behind. It is really funny to see her in them. She is magnificent."

So Quentin thought, an hour later, when, having dressed for dinner, he found himself in the little breakfast-room of a year ago. The dining-room was too large and cold, Lady Eldon had said. They should all have lumbago as badly as Eldon. There was a goodly company assembled at the table, despite Madame's assurance that it had been difficult to get any one to come. Mademoiselle was there, her peculiarities not lessened with time; and Quentin was thankful to find that he had been placed on Madame's right, three seats from the poor little Weasel. M. le Maurier, whom he had met there be-

fore, was on Lady Eldon's left. "Ah, Napoleon Third!" some one had exclaimed when they first saw him. Miss Spencer was at the Abbey, and welcomed Quentin with effusion. The Baroness, and Lady Barnes, and Miss Jenkins were further down the table, as well as some men whom Quentin had a slight recollection of having seen on his first visit; but the Count St. Aubin and the Alsatian were gone. There was no Gartha, no Valery, and, what summed up in two words all Quentin's misery, no Alixe. How changed everything was! Lord Eldon did not come down. Dinner was served by the pompous butler and two English footmen, Charles standing at the door looking gloomily in, and refusing to go to the kitchen for a single dish. He had been superseded; now let them see how they could get on by themselves.

There was a long wait between the soup and the fish, and finally the message was brought in that there was no fish. My lady, mistress of herself though china fall, carried on her conversation with M. le Maurier and Quentin by turns, laying her hands on one of theirs alternately, with the exclamation, "You dear!" But there were two very bright spots on her cheeks which art had not placed there, and Quentin could see in imagination a corps of domestics leaving by train on the following morning. He heard with much amusement that Pierre Monrouge, who carried the orders to market, had understood Sellers to say that my lady wished some "poison"; that his sister, Marie Monrouge, now travelling with the Duchess, had left her little dictionnaire behind; that he had consulted it, and had found that "poison" stood for "toxique," poison mortel. He thought that my lady

had wished for something to poison the rats, which had come into the house during the cold weather. He had a large parcel of it in the cuisine, plenty for all the rats in the house, and Pierre Monrouge looked meaningly at the English butler.

"He knew perfectly well what I wanted," Madame confided to Quentin. "They make me all the trouble they can, just because we brought those men from the Towers. The men themselves positively hate it. They consider it a broken-down old place compared with Eldon Towers, and so it is; they cannot speak the language, they are not accustomed to petty French ways, and there is a constant disturbance. They wilfully misunderstand me and each other. The wonder is that we get anything to eat at all."

Quentin laughed at Madame's distress as she poured out her tale after dinner in the salon.

"And now I must go and talk with Monsieur le Maurier. He is waiting for me," she said. "He only came for the evening, and as he came at my request, I must give him a little of my time."

"What can he have to say?" said Quentin to himself. This question was answered, almost as if he had spoken aloud, by Miss Spencer, who formerly had spent all her time in enlightening Quentin as to the mental attitude of every one at the Abbey.

"Le Maurier has come to tell her all about Bruno," she said in a low tone. "You know he had suspected him for a long time, and when Mamasha thought that she was the bait, it was Bruno and Halle whom he was tracking. You have heard, I suppose, that he is an agent of the secret police."

"No, I didn't know it," said Quentin. "I thought he was the editor of a paper."

"I suppose a man can be both in France; at all events, a man is never what he pretends to be over here—or, for that matter, anywhere else. Did you ever see things go as they do now that Mamasha is My Lady? No one minds her now that Alixe is not here to make them; not one single word she says. The consequence is we sometimes go without poulet for breakfast, or cheese, or salad, as the case may be, or without fish, as to-night. Really, I cannot stand it. I am getting so run down that I shall have to go home to recuperate. I intended to ask you to go up the hill and see how forgetful Mamasha is becoming in her old age——"

"I hadn't noticed that Lady Eldon is becoming forgetful," said Quentin loyally.

"Wait till you see the tombstone. The title is entirely obscured by moss——"

"She has another title now," smiled Quentin. "She cannot use two, and after all, Miss Spencer, we cannot nurse our griefs forever."

"That has a double application. I think you are very sensible. Do you know, Mr. Quentin, that Alixe has fully decided upon a conventual life?"

"No, I don't know," said Quentin quickly.

"No, you don't know; but it is true. The Archbishop says that she has given her word; and when Alixe gives her word, it is fixed as the laws of the Medes. Do you ever hear from them? Don't look so awfully down. There are as good fish in the sea as ever were caught, though we can't get them for dinner!"

"I have had one letter from Valery," said Quentin, answering Miss Spencer's question and ignoring her comments. "But my young nephew is with them; he writes me semi-occasionally."

"When he wants money, I suppose."

"Yes," said Quentin. "I used to do the same."

"The boy the father of the man, and all that sort of thing. Gracious, how cold it is! I feel as if one of Gartha's revenants was passing behind my back. I wonder what Mamasha and le Maurier are talking about so long. I suppose you would like to say she will probably tell me if she wants me to know, only you are too polite."

"That might be said to convey the gist of my thoughts." Quentin laughed and looked toward Lady Eldon. He saw that she laid her hand on the little man's arm, probably with a "You dear!" and accompanied him to the door of the salon with a few last low words. As the great half of the door was opened, swift gusts of air blew in.

"Oh, dear!" groaned Lady Barnes, "why can't that common little man go out the other way? He can get through the dining-room just as well."

Le Maurier had paid Lady Eldon a very effusive farewell.

"That is what in the Land of the Free you call a put-up job," said Miss Spencer. "He isn't going home at all. There is no train to-night. I really wonder what all this pretence means!"

Here Mademoiselle struck a few notes on the grand piano, shivered, squealed, withdrew her cold, red, little claws, then struck the keys again, and my lady's sweet middle-aged voice, with a little strain in it, pealed forth in the mad song from "Lucia." Quentin was taken back in a flash to that evening a year ago, in the summer, when Alixe had forbidden the song to be sung in her presence. He thought again, as he had a hundred times, of the ruin, of his following her

there, of what she had said, of what she had allowed —that handclasp which was to last him through eternity—and in one of my lady's most shrill roulades he crept out quietly and closed the door. The night was cold and blustery, but Quentin's blood was young, and he ran down the stone steps, through the tunnel, which was now entwined only with branches denuded of leaves. He could see the sky overhead, the cold stars glinting between the interstices of the leafless growth, and the winter clouds skurrying across the darkness, but he ran on and entered the ruin. Here he was enclosed and defended from the blasts which blew over the garden and round the château. He sought the bent tree. The limb where she had sat was covered with a fine little layer of snow. He brushed it aside, and pressed his lips to the place where her hand had rested. A sound caused him to turn. Quentin for a moment was struck with a horror that was new to him. He did not believe in ghosts, in the common acceptation of the term, and yet for a moment he thought that he had penetrated the mystery of the Abbey. He turned to see dark forms, five of them, crossing the interior space of the ruin. From each hand there depended a light. The procession was decorous and quiet. Two of the men carried a something between them. It seemed to be light in weight. The others walked two ahead and one behind. As the procession reached the centre space, the burden was rested upon one of the old stone seats, the seat near where Madame used to pour tea for her guests on midsummer afternoons. Quentin stood transfixed in the dark corner where he had entrenched himself, and waited. A low laugh broke the stillness of the

lonely interior. It jarred upon his nerves, it seemed to be out of place there. And then, in the light of the lantern, he saw a face that he knew; it was the face of le Maurier, who had bidden Lady Eldon good-night but a short time before. The five figures stamped their feet on the ground—they clapped their hands to their ears, but all was done with a due observance of the proprieties. "Take him up again, mes garçons," said the voice of le Maurier; "we know at least, that he skulks no more about the earth, seeking whom he may kill. When you leave the Abbey, turn to the left. Go through the flower garden, the Count St. Aubin's rooms, my lady said. Extinguish your lanterns. Once outside, we shall have light enough." The men filed out of the archway. Quentin saw that one of the lanterns had been left upon the ground. No sooner had the mysterious party disappeared than he went swiftly toward the lantern, took it up from the ground, blew out the light, and retreated to his former vantage point. He had barely regained his place when he heard swift footsteps. Some one entered the ruin. A match was scratched. The man was evidently looking for the lantern carelessly left behind. His search being unsuccessful, he turned back again.

When the sound of footsteps had died away along the garden path, Quentin passed toward the outer opening through which le Maurier and his men had come, and when once well outside the wall, he lighted his lantern. Here he was screened from any view of the châlet or the château itself. Some unexplained suspicion led him at once to the passage which he remembered, the passage into which Gartha had penetrated one day. Here at its mouth he found a

disturbed state of affairs. Most of the entrance wall had been knocked away, and now that the grass and summer growth had died down, he saw that the tunnel was marked on the surface of the ground by a slight ridge. He climbed the terrace, and walked along this ridge. He stumbled and nearly fell into a hole, and started back just in time. This made him the more cautious, and it was as well, for he found that these excavations were to be seen every little way. At one about three hundred feet from the opening he discovered a very manifest disturbance of the earth. He lowered his lantern, and found an excavation deeper than the rest.

Quentin set his lantern among the stubble, and lowered himself into the hole. His foot struck something as it met the ground. The hole was large enough for him to stoop. This he did, and felt for and raised in his hand the thing against which his foot had struck. He brought it out to the light of the lantern, and examined it there. It was the sandal of a priest, mildewed, and giving forth the odors of the charnel house.

XLVIII.

They had been travelling for a year, Valery and Alixe, as ever good friends. Jan and Gartha were constantly falling out with each other, devoted at one moment, at the next silence marking their companionship.

These quarrels caused Valery many hilarious moments, and Alixe too smiled at times. Still she had taken on a very serious cast of countenance. At the first stopping place where such things were procurable, she had deepened the mourning which she had worn for Virginia Danielli to the most sombre crêpe of widowhood, and, with the enveloping veil, she went about simply a personality among them, her thought and spirit far away. "She's only wearing that for propriety's sake," said Valery to Gartha, to whom he unburdened his mind more than was proper. "She will cheer up after a while and be like other people."

Once, at Cairo, where their travels had led them, when Valery was buying some bright stuffs and amulets for Gartha, who, after each conflict between herself and Jan, loved to array herself in them in the endeavor to redazzle him, Valery brought to Alixe a strange Egyptian chain and threw it over her head.

"Wear this, Alixe," he said, "as a reminder of this trip of ours."

Alixe hastily removed the chain.

"No, Valery," she said, "do not give me such

things. Let me give it to Gartha. She loves everything that is bright and pretty. As for me, I shall never wear anything but the deepest black forever more."

"What nonsense, Alixe! Why you are not yet twenty-two. Do you mean to tell me that you have finished with life? Bruno is gone past recall. Try to look upon the future differently. I had hoped that you were beginning to. You have a long life before you——"

"A long life of expiation," said Alixe solemnly.

Valery gasped, "Expiation! What do you mean, Alixe?"

"What I say, Valery. Expiation! Expiation! Bruno took his life for me. I must expiate that until my dying breath. I have written to my dear Archbishop. I have told him that I am strong and well, and ready to take up my work in the sisterhood; to take the vows. In short, to do that which I intended to do when I came to the Abbey to nurse Gartha."

There was a howl from a dark corner of the room. Gartha had slipped in unobserved.

"You shall not! You shall not! Mon Dieu! you shall not," raged and screamed Gartha. "I know all about why my Uncle Bruno killed himself. Juge pour vous-même. I know the whole thing. You shall not leave me and go into a convent, not for forty dead Uncle Brunos. He——"

"Gartha! Stop!" shouted Valery in a voice of thunder, but Gartha, though she had never heard this tone from her father before, was not to be hindered. Her words poured forth like a cloud-burst upon the mountains.

"He was âme damnée. I saw it in Mamasha's letter

to Valery. He did not kill himself neither for you, neither for me. Ni l'un ni l'autre. I was con-conceited to think he did. It was for neither you, neither me. It was——"

"Gartha! Stop!"

"It was because he had blowed up the steamer with Virginia Danielli on board, and he knew it would all come out, and he was afraid to face——"

"There! See what you have done!" said Valery. "You have killed her!"

He stooped over the unconscious form of Alixe, which had fallen upon the floor. "Call somebody quickly, if you can stop that confounded tongue of yours long enough to change its tune. Alixe! Alixe! Do you hear me? Gartha, call some one."

They travelled here and there for eight months more, Alixe the shadow of her former self, and then when nearly two years had passed since the death of St. Aubin, they turned their steps toward home.

Jan MacDonald had been the weary recipient of long and constant epistles from his uncle; Gartha, of an occasional one. Jan, forgetful and unmindful of the uncle who was giving him an experience which is a rare one for a lad of his years, wrote but seldom.

"Another of Uncle Jack's blowing ups," said Jan to Gartha one day. "He never worried over me so when I was in Scotland. I can't see why he wants to know so much about me now. Just listen to this, will you?"

"Dear Jan:

"You never tell me anything about the kind friends with whom you are travelling. You say, 'I went to see the great piremid,' 'I saw the Spynx' (mark the spelling), 'I rode a Donkey at cairo' (please remark

the capitals), 'I went up to the second cataract in Mr. Valery's dahabeya,' but you never say with whom you went or how they are. I cannot understand how a young lad like you can be so conceited as to think that he is the only person in the world, and his movements the only ones to be chronicled. I am ashamed of you for the first time. Now sit down, and see if you can talk of any one but yourself, and tell me all that you do; who goes with you; the health of every one in the party, etc., and oblige your affectionate

"Uncle Jack."

"Didn't he give me particular rats?" said Jan.

"I should think you would understand the raison d'être of that letter," said Gartha, nose in air; "he wishes to hear about me, and you tell him only about yourself."

"Do you think it's that?" Jan's face clouded over.

"You'd better sit right down and tell him all he wants to know, or he may cease your allowance," returned Gartha. "Voilà! I will give you some of my stamped paper that came out from Paris. Now sit down and begin."

The result was as follows:

"Dere Uncle i am not very good at writin letters, and you neednt give me so much rats every time because i havnt mentioned the person you are intrested in gartha is puffecly well gartha went to the piremids with me we both rode donkeys and Mr. valery said that gartha was the bulliest rider of the lot but i think that was all guff he gives us lots of larries gatha believes em i dont gartha went to the Nile in the darby, and when she got to the first catrac she cried and said she should never see John Quentin again and her farther said dont be a fool and when one of the arabins wanted to pull her upon the piry-

mids she cried because she said he nerely pulled her arms out of her sokits and when he asked for a thing they call backshish out here and said she should never come down lessn she give it to him, her farther called him a durty brute and kicked him haf way down the pirymids and she goes about like a eastern queen all bangles and sequins and amlets and she puts a thing over her head an looks through peep holes an she says shes goin to live in a hareem so you better come quick if you want to keep her from being bow stringed thats what they do to em wen they get tired of em but i dont see how any one could get tired of gartha she is such a funny little minks, and she says she wants to get home and so i think we will be comin soon now as this hole party seemes to be doin just what gartha wants em to for she runs the shebang and no mistake so i expec well be in marsales gartha calls it marsay i dont see why in lessn a fortnit an to paris throo by daylite and with love from gartha so no more from your obedient nephew

"John Quentin MacDonald.

"I've told you all you want to know please dont stop my allowns I want to buy a bracelet for gartha."

"That'll fetch him," said Master John MacDonald to himself.

Extract from a letter written by Lady Eldon to Hilary Valery, Esq.:

"And now for a piece of news, bona fide news. Our American friend is going to marry. I really cannot understand it. He seemed to care for—well, for different people, in the days gone by, but not for Ada Spencer. Now he is going to marry her, at Ada's sister's house in Hampshire. They have a little cottage there at Milton-on-Sea. There is nothing but a sort of downs and the Channel to look at. To be sure, there is golf, but I don't think that will fill

his cup, if Ada cannot. You know how they used to quarrel ['I don't remember that Ada ever quarrelled with Quentin,' mused Valery; 'I thought she was rather fond of him.'] And how she abused him behind his back. But now she has taken him, and not too crooked a stick either. I should say rather that it was he who has been through the wood, and taken up with a crooked stick at last. She is older than he, that I know for certain ['Yes, I think she is,' mused Valery], and she is taller than he."

"There's where you're out, Mamasha," said Valery, "she is not taller than Quentin. Oh! holà, Alixe! I've got a letter from Mamasha. She gives me a queer piece of news."

"What is it?" asked Alixe faintly.

"Why, Quentin is going to be married. I wonder he has stayed single so long. I can't understand his choice exactly. You don't say anything, Alixe? What's the matter with you?"

"Why should I say anything? I am sure I hope they will both be happy. Who is the lady?"

"You'd never guess," said Valery; "the Weasel would be more likely. Ada Spencer, of all things! You know how he used to run from her, and now—well! words fail. Do you want to go home for the wedding, Alixe?"

"Oh, no!" said Alixe decidedly, "I prefer to remain abroad. Gartha wishes to go to India, and I do not think a year more of it will harm her."

On that day Alixe wrote a second long letter to the Archbishop. The final words of the letter were: "I have firmly decided to enter the conventual life. This is my irrevocable determination. Although I shall remain here for a year longer, I shall, in that time,

strengthen my health and my convictions, and at the end of the year, you may expect me in Paris, to enter where you may counsel me to go. I am a poor, broken reed; but what is left of my life, and I am young, dear Archbishop, shall be devoted to a holy life and good works, if one so unworthy may be permitted to add that much to the glory of the Church."

A little later Hilary Valery, Esq., received a characteristic letter from Lady Eldon. It ran:

"My Dearest Valery:

"I cannot see what you are all about that you do not write a line to me. I should think Gartha might write to her poor little Mamasha occasionally.

"We have had a charming stay at the Abbey, but are going back to England next week. You must come to Eldon Towers when you return. Mr. Quentin and Ada Spencer have both been staying here. You will wish to come home, of course, for the marriage. I hear that it is to take place at Ada Spencer's sister's in June. Of course, entre nous, Alixe will not want the necklace, as I hear from the Archbishop that she has decided to enter the convent after all. Please, dear Valery, do not mention it to any one. There is no reason why all that money should go to the convent—heaven knows that if she gives them half her fortune it will be more than ample. She should give the other half to me, since Bruno cannot claim it. I am her mother, the one to whom she is indebted for all that she has in the world. ['Faith, I should think so!' ejaculated Valery.] Had it not been for me, she would to-day possess no fortune and no title. ['Nor two husbands,' interpolated Valery, 'one a dotard and a roûe, and the other a malefactor. Clever Mamasha! Little cat!'] Please see to this, Valery, for generous as Eldon is, it would be pleasant to have a little bank account of one's own.

"Always your devoted

"Annie Eldon."

When Alixe read this letter, she showed no sign of agitation. On that day there went away by express a tiny parcel addressed to Quentin. He received it a few days afterward in Paris. On the paper which enclosed the little box was written in a clear hand which Quentin did not know:

"For your wife."

"For your wife"—Quentin repeated the words over and over again, but it was not until he opened the box, and saw his own ring lying within its enveloping cotton, that he knew from whom the parcel had come.

XLIX.

Quentin awoke one morning to the feeling that life was hopeless and dull in the extreme, and that the best thing that he could do with himself was to pack his trunk and start for America. He had, in fact, laid his finger on the electric button, when Jan's round face came staring at him from the blank wall of his hotel bedroom. He must wait for the lad, of that there was no doubt. But where should he wait? Should he remain in Paris until he heard from Valery? And when he did hear, should he go and fetch the child, or should he allow Valery either to send or bring him to Paris? The very thought of going to the Abbey made his heart thump like a sledge-hammer. A steamer sailed on the following day, the steamer upon which he preferred of all others to take passage. If he only knew where Valery was, he could telegraph him. How strange of Valery not to keep him informed of his movements, and how outrageous of Jan. Jan had been most neglectful. His allowance had been almost doubled, with the hope that his gratitude would suggest prompt answers to his uncle's letters, with the very slight hope added that he would throw in something regarding the welfare of the party. As Quentin dressed he worked himself into a fever of indignation with Valery and Jan, the latter in particular.

He had rung for a telegraph blank, which he meant

to fill out and despatch to Madame at Eldon Towers, when a servant brought him a message. He tore it open, hoping, fearing; his feelings mixed; his fingers trembling. It was from Hilary Valery, Esq., and ran thus: "We arrived at the Abbey last night. Come down and dine."

Quentin never lost his belief in telepathy after this signal instance. He followed Valery's instructions to the letter, and late afternoon found him starting for Moncousis. When his bag was packed, he ran hurriedly down the stairs and out into the street, where the first person whom he saw, and against whom, in his nervous state, he ran, was the Archbishop. The two men had seen more or less of each other during the year that was past. As the Archbishop's eye fell upon Quentin's hurrying, nervous figure, his last letter from Alixe came at once to his mind. His Grace was feeling extremely cheerful as well as secure, for had not he, as the representative of the Church, outwitted Quentin, who stood for the world and the devil, each warring for the soul of Alixe?

To be sure, the letter from Alixe had been received a long time ago; but in it she expressed it as her unalterable determination that she should take up the conventual life upon her return to France. Although the Archbishop and Quentin had met occasionally, His Grace had never broached the subject which was of such vital interest to both. During one of the few visits which Quentin had paid him, the Archbishop had exclaimed: "Ah, Mr. Quentin, what a Catholic you would make! Why not come to us? Your character is so earnest, so firm, so absolutely single of purpose, so devoted."

Quentin knew well what had called forth this unusual burst of expression from the prelate. He knew that His Grace recognized the fact that, although they were each silent with regard to Alixe, each could read the mind of the other as well as if their thoughts were printed in the blackest type and covered only by a clear pane of crystal, and that each mind was, for the time, and perhaps because of the special companionship, filled with one and the same person. On this day the Archbishop could but note the expectant look in Quentin's eyes.

"You seem to be going somewhere, Mr. Quentin," said His Grace, with his ever-gentle smile. "To Eldon Towers, perhaps. Give my warmest regards to them all. Is Miss Spencer there? I hear that she is going to marry that curious little person, Mr. Ware."

"I am going to the Abbey," said Quentin bluntly. "They are at home, you know."

"At home! They are at home? But that is strange. I have heard nothing. When did they arrive?"

"Yesterday. I have had a wire from Valery this morning."

"At the Abbey? And she did not—I shall go with you," said the Archbishop, breaking in upon his first sentence.

"For what?" asked Quentin abruptly.

"And why should I not ask that same question of you, Mr. Quentin? I have known them all, down there, for many years, long before she was married to the Duca di Brazzia; but, of course, she did not live at the Abbey then. That goes without saying."

The Archbishop's sentence sounded almost comic to Quentin. He had said simply "she," but there was no need for either of them to particularize further.

"Why should I not go?" added the Archbishop after a moment's silence.

"I asked why you were going," repeated Quentin.

"And I answer that they are old friends of mine. Why should I not go? Old and dear friends. Is Lady Eldon there?"

"I know nothing—I have not seen her for some time. I have heard but once or twice since I stayed at Eldon Towers last autumn."

"And what have you been doing since, Mr. Quentin?"

Had Quentin answered truly, he would have said, "Eating my heart out," but as one seldom gives an honest answer to any question, even the most trivial, he replied: "Oh! I have been travelling here and there, to Switzerland, to Aix, passing the time as best I could, until my nephew returns."

"And where is your nephew, if I may ask?"

"He has been with—with—them, with Valery and —and his party. He is with them at the Abbey. I am going down to get the lad."

Quentin edged along past the Archbishop as if eager to get away.

"And then?"

"I do not know. Take him home to America, perhaps. But I must be off, Your Grace, or I shall lose my train."

"Your train? Going now to your train?"

"And why not?" returned Quentin, quoting with a smile the Archbishop's words of a moment ago.

His Grace looked at Quentin earnestly.

"Ah! Mr. Quentin," he said, "what a Catholic you would have made. It is not too late. Come to me when you return. Let me have a talk with you—she,

you know—that idea is out of the question. She has promised me——"

"I know nothing," said Quentin, with a glimmer of hope in his look, that caused the Archbishop a shade of anxiety, "but that I am going to the Abbey, and I must not lose my train. I will come to you when I return, but I really must be off."

"I shall follow you," called the Archbishop after the hurrying figure. "I shall not be long behind you; make up your mind to that."

Quentin nodded and smiled over his shoulder. He could smile at the Archbishop, now that he had succeeded in evading him. He almost ran toward the cab-stand. He threw his bag into the fiacre, threw himself in after it, and was whirled away to the station. By dint of repeated promises of pourboire, he just managed to pass through the gates of the station before they were closed. He made a very close connection all the way, and at the straggling little village of Moncousis he, this time, found a vehicle in waiting, and, springing in, was jolted along the road toward the Abbey. Antoine doubled back, under-ran the railway, and was soon on the way toward the great enclosure which Quentin had seen two years ago for the first time. The train was the same which had brought him to the Abbey on his first visit, and as then, the night was falling. Again he gazed upon the long, white, dusty ribbon of the road which stretched away in perspective; again he saw the fields, darkening wastes under a light, fading dimly. Ah! here was the hill. Antoine turned his horse to the left, and they were soon ascending it. To the right, again, they curved with jerk and jounce, and now stood out the great wall, flinging its barriers across

the plain of little country gardens. But barrier though it was, it advanced to meet Quentin; it held out a welcoming hand to him, he felt, he hoped; and, as if in sympathy, the leaves upon the near hillside murmured and whispered, "She is here! She is here!"

Quentin, as he gazed upward at the moss-grown gray squares of stone, expected almost, while deeming it improbable, to see a little brown head peering down at him from over its tiled roof. And so it came about. It was all so natural, when Gartha's voice, Gartha's voice grown older and more assured, called, "Valery, is that you?" that Quentin could have thought that time had flown backward, that it was the dead August of three years past, and that he was now approaching the Abbey for the first time. But ah, no! In that twilight August walk of three years ago he knew of no Alixe. Since that time, he felt as if he had known of nothing else.

Quentin made no sign to Gartha. Through the uncertain dusk she saw only the black form within the station wagon. He heard her say, "I thought it might be Valery or John Quentin," and a boyish voice answered with frank lack of flattery: "Not he! Not Uncle Jack. He likes Paris too well to come down here the first thing."

A hundred yards further and Antoine had drawn up at the gate, and had rung the bell. Charles answered, as of old, with his ever polite "Bon jour, Monsieur," and the gratuitous information that Monsieur Valery had gone to Paris to meet Mr. Quentin, as he had received no reply to his message. Quentin remembered now that he had not replied. He had forgotten the proprieties in his anticipation. He

entered upon the broad terrace. It seemed like a dream that he had dreamed before. He breathed the perfume of flowers. The salon door was open. There was no one about.

Quentin was agitated beyond measure. He did not wait to speak further with Charles or Antoine, but walked hurriedly to the head of the old stone steps, and looked across the flower garden at the ragged edges of the ruin. The great trees thrust their heads out of the enclosure as of old; their branches waved in the night wind. Were they beckoning to him, or were they warning him away? The odors of the yellow roses, cinnamon pinks, and mignonette were abroad upon the air. How inexpressibly entrancing it all was! The hour, the place, the gently fading light lapsing into mysterious shadow, the scents of a summer dead and gone; they seemed to clasp him in an embrace from which he could not escape, and hold him close. He found himself murmuring, "Have there been other days than this?" and then there came a sudden pang at his heart. Suppose she had not come after all!

Quentin descended the stairs with hurried steps and was at once within the tunnel of greenery, which had grown denser in the three years during which he had not seen it freshly leaved. Afar, he thought that he heard voices. He stopped and listened.

Ah! They were only Gartha's high tones, mingled with the boyish ones of Jan. Then there came to him upon the night air the sound of the lad's whistle; but that was far down along the convent wall, the way by which he had come.

Quentin approached the old door of the Abbey church. He was overcome with emotion. Could it

be that three whole years had passed since he had sat there with her for a few brief moments, and held her hands in his? Should he find her within? He could not think of it now without her. That other visit that he had paid in the late autumn to Madame had nothing to do with her. Her time was the time of the mignonette, the cinnamon pinks, the yellow roses.

Quentin passed through the archway. Was the ruin empty? He stood for a moment thinking wonderful confused thoughts, fearing to go forward, unwilling to retreat. Was that a dim shape over there where the tall oaks grew? As he stood thus waiting, he heard again a low voice calling, "Gartha, Gartha, where are you?" and again "Gartha, Gartha, where are you?" and he knew now that at the first sound of that voice in that wonderful summer now past his soul had fallen before her. She was seated upon the bent limb from which he had brushed the snow on his last visit to the ruin. As she saw that some one approached her out of the dusk, she arose with a faint exclamation, her tall figure outlined against the sombre wall. Quentin advanced slowly, hesitatingly, as one approaches a shrine. When she saw who was coming toward her, she uttered a little cry of welcome, and took a step forward. He hastened his steps, and in a moment he was at her feet holding both her hands within his own.

L.

THE good Archbishop was perplexed. As he walked away from Quentin he found himself wondering why the young man should have decided thus suddenly to go down to the Abbey. He felt quite certain that Quentin would not be able to change the mind of Alixe. She had written him, now some time ago, that she was prepared for a whole life of expiation, a long, long life. She was young, only twenty-two years old. If the Archbishop experienced a pang that so much beauty and youth and life should be shut away from the world forever, he quenched any such weakness for the sake of that Lord and Master whom he served, and had ever served whereinsoever he thought his duty lay.

"I should have gone with him," he murmured to himself as he proceeded toward his own house. "It is true that I promised to see the sister who is dying at Ste. Marie, but this,—this—but—no! no! I cannot go to night. I cannot break my promise. I will take the early train to-morrow.

"Pack my bag," he said to his servant on entering the door. "I must be away betimes in the morning."

The road from the station to Moncousis was wet, and the dew was hardly off the grass when the Archbishop arrived at the Abbey gate. He had passed a wakeful and a serious night. He had administered to the dying nun, soothed her pillow, given her absolu-

tion, and with the eyes of faith had almost seen her glorified spirit vanish through those portals where his soon must follow; for the Archbishop was an old man now, and the blow which had felled him to the ground had left its trace upon his frame and nerves. Charles opened at His Grace's ring. The visitor, with but a hurried, kindly nod, hastened across the terrace like one on some important errand bent. The salon door, which was always thrown wide on sunny summer days, stood open as of old; but, as upon Quentin's arrival, the great room held no occupant. The Archbishop, scenting danger, turned away, and, with a quick step for so old a man, descended the stone stairway, and entered the Abbey.

They saw him as he entered, Quentin and Alixe. She ran to meet him, both arms outstretched. She fell upon his neck and kissed him as a daughter might have done. She was brimming over with new life and smiles. She was transfigured. There was a rose flush upon her cheek, which the Archbishop had never seen before. She had something of white thrown around her shoulders; about her throat was a tiny chain, and upon it hung a ring which the Archbishop remembered to have picked up from the floor of his library and restored to her.

"My daughter," said His Grace, "my dear, dear daughter!"

Her open expression of affection touched him deeply, and overcame him for the moment. Is it possible that he thought of something which might have been—a something which his unselfish life had made impossible—a something which, but for his self-abnegation, he too might have shared—of a filial affection which might have been his by right?

"My daughter," he said again, and placed his two withered hands upon her shoulders. His lips trembled. He looked uncertainly toward Quentin, who stood a few paces away, and then back at Alixe. He fixed her with his eye, looked squarely into the shining depths of hers, and said, "I have come to claim your promise"; but his voice faltered as he reached the end of his sentence, for he realized all in a moment that he had lost.

"Dear Archbishop!" said Alixe. She leaned against this lovable old man with a confidence which had no trace of fear in it, tears gathered in the brightness of her eyes, and rolled down over a face beaming with happy smiles. "Dear Archbishop"—she looked toward Quentin—"that letter was written under a misapprehension."

"Under a misapprehension, my child? You surely have not forgotten what you wrote to me. You said, 'I am coming home to you, to the sweet peace of the conventual life. I am coming back to you, to take upon me the vows of the sisterhood. I am going to leave the world, that is my irrevocable determination—to leave the world forever.'"

"Ah! Your Grace," said Alixe, her face still shining with tears and smiles, "dear old friend, I cannot leave the world. It is a lovely world. It is a beautiful world. I do not care to leave it." She laid one hand upon his shoulder and stretched the other toward Quentin.

THE END

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